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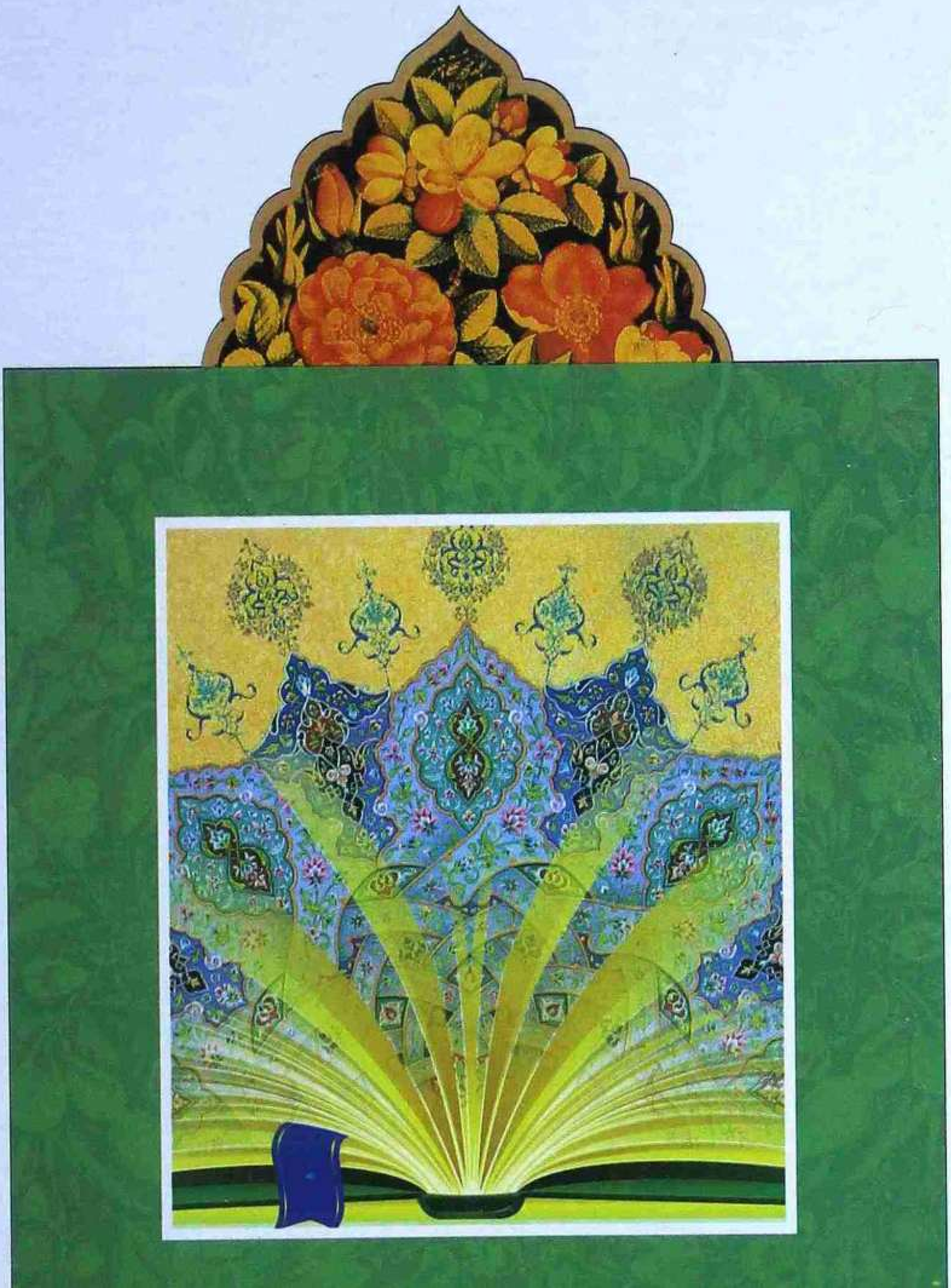
The Ahl-ul-Bayt (a.s) World Assembly

# ISLAMIC THOUGHT
## (Ma‘ārif Islāmī)

### Book One

Muhammad Sa‘īdī-Mihr & Amīr Dīvānī

Translator: Abuzar Ahmadi



بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

**IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,**
**THE ALL-BENEFICENT, THE ALL-MERCIFUL**

قال الله تعالى:

﴿إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

Indeed, Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.

***(Sūrat al-Aḥzāb 33:33)***

Prophetic traditions, mentioned in both Sunni and Shiite most reliable reference books of Hadith and Tafsir (Quranic Exegesis), have confirmed that this holy verse was revealed to exclusively involve the five individuals of the Cloak; namely, Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn, peace be upon them, to whom the term 'Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House)' is solely dedicated.

For instance, refer to the following reference books:

A. Sunni Reference Books:

(1) Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), *al-Musnad*, 1:331; 4:107; 6:292, 304. (2) *Sahih Muslim* (d. 261 AH), 7:130. (3) Al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH), *Sunan*, 5:361 et al. (4) Al-Dulabi (d. 310 AH), *al-Dhurriyyah al-Tahirah al-Nabawiyyah*, pp. 108. (5) Al-Nassa'i (d. 303 AH), *al-Sunan al-Kubra,* 5:P108, 113. (6) al-Hakim al-Naysaburi (d. 405 AH), *al-Mustadrak ala al-Sahihayn*, 2:416, 3:133, 146, 147. (7) al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH), *al-Burhan*, pp. 197. (8) Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d. 852), *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, 7:104.

B. Shiite Reference Books:

(1) Al-Kulayni (d. 328 AH), *Usul al-Kafi*, 1:287. (2) Ibn Babawayh (d. 329 AH), *al-Imamah wa'l-Tabsirah*, pp. 47, H. 29. (3) Al-Maghribi (d. 363 AH), *Da'aa'im al-Islam*, pp. 35, 37. (4) Al-Saduq (d. 381 AH), *al-Khisal*, pp. 403, 550. (5) Al-Tusi (d. 460 AH), *al-Amaali*, H. 438, 482, 783.

For more details, refer to the exegesis of the holy verse involved in the following reference books of *tafsir*: (1) Al-Tabari (d. 310 AH), *Book of Tafsir*. (2) Al-Jassass (d. 370 AH), *Ahkam al-Qur'an*. (3) Al-Wahidi (d. 468 AH), *Asbaab al-Nuzoul*. (4) Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), *Zaad al-Maseer*. (5) Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH), *al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*. (6) Ibn Katheer (d. 774 AH), *Book of Tafsir*. (7) Al-Tha'aalibi (d. 825 AH), *Book of Tafsir*. (8) Al-Suyouti (d. 911 AH), *al-Durr al-Manthour*. (9) Al-Shawkani (d. 1250 AH), *Fath al-Qadeer*. (10) Al-Ayyashi (d. 320 AH), *Book of Tafsir*. (11) Al-Qummi (d. 329 AH), *Book of Tafsir*. (12) Furt al-Kufi (d. 352 AH), *Book of Tafsir*; in the margin of the exegesis of verse 4:59. (13) Al-Tabrisi (d. 560 AH), *Majma' al-Bayan*, as well as many other reference books of Hadith and Tafsir.

# Islamic Thought
# (Ma‘ārif Islāmī)

## Book One

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ ﷺ:

إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمُ الثَّقَلَيْنِ: كِتَابَ اللهِ وَعِتْرَتِي أَهْلَ بَيْتِي، مَا إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي أَبَداً، وَإِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ.

The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said:
"Verily, I am leaving among you two precious things [Thaqalayn]: The Book of Allah and my progeny ['Itrah], the members of my Household [Ahl al-Bayt]. If you hold fast to them, you shall never go astray. These two will never separate from each other until they meet me at the Pond [ḥawḍ] (of Kawthar)."

## Some of its references:

Al-Ḥākim an-Nayshābūrī, Al-Mustadrak `alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn (Beirut), vol. 3, pp. 109-110, 148, 533

Muslim, Al-Ṣaḥīḥ, (English translation), book 31, ḥadīths 5920-3

At-Tirmidhī, Al-Ṣaḥīḥ, vol. 5, pp. 621-2, ḥadīths 3786, 3788; vol. 2, p. 219

An-Nassā'ī, Khaṣā'iṣ 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, ḥadīth 79

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Al-Musnad, vol. 3, pp. 14, 17, 26; vol. 3, pp. 26, 59; vol. 4, p. 371; vol. 5, pp. 181-182, 189-190

Ibn al-Athīr, Jāmi` al-Uṣūl, vol. 1, p. 277

Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāyah wa'n-Nihāyah, vol. 5, p. 209

Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-`Aẓīm, vol. 6, p. 199

Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albanī, Silsilat al-Aḥādīth aṣ-ṣaḥīḥah (Kuwait: Ad-Dar as-Salafiyyah), vol. 4, pp. 355-358

# Islamic Thought
# (Ma'ārif Islāmī)

## Book One

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**The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly**

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# Islamic Thought (Ma'ārif Islāmī)

**Book One**

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# Publisher's Foreword

**In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful**

The invaluable legacy of the Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*] of the Prophet (may peace be upon them all), as preserved by their followers, is a comprehensive school of thought that embraces all branches of Islamic knowledge. This school has produced many brilliant scholars who have drawn inspiration from this rich and pure resource. It has given many scholars to the Muslim *ummah* who, following in the footsteps of Imāms of the Prophet's Household (*'a*), have done their best to clear up the doubts raised by various creeds and currents within and without Muslim society and to answer their questions. Throughout the past centuries, they have given well-reasoned answers and clarifications concerning these questions and doubts.

To meet the responsibilities assigned to it, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) has embarked on a defence of the sanctity of the Islamic message and its verities, often obscured by the partisans of various sects and creeds as well as by currents hostile to Islam. The Assembly follows in the footsteps of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*'a*) and the disciples of their school of thought in its readiness to confront these challenges and tries to be on the frontline in consonance with the demands of every age.

The arguments contained in the works of the scholars belonging to the School of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (*'a*) are of unique significance. That is because they are based on genuine scholarship and appeal to reason, and avoid prejudice and bias. These arguments address scholars and thinkers in a manner that appeals to healthy minds and wholesome human nature.

To assist the seekers of truth, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly has endeavored to present a new phase of these arguments contained in the studies and translations of the works of contemporary Shī'ah writers and those who have embraced this sublime school of thought through divine blessing.

The Assembly is also engaged in edition and publication of the valuable works of leading Shī'ah scholars of earlier ages to assist the seekers of the truth in discovering the truths which the School of the Prophet's Household (*'a*) has offered to the entire world.

The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly looks forward to benefit from the opinions of the readers and their suggestions and constructive criticism in this area.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the genuine Islamic teachings as preached by the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ).

We beseech God, the Most High, to accept our humble efforts and to enable us to enhance them under the auspices of Imām al-Mahdī, His vicegerent on the earth (may Allah expedite his advent).

We express our gratitude to Muhammad Sa'idi-Mehr and Amir Divani, the authors of the present book, and Abuzar Ahmadi, its translator. We also thank our colleagues who have participated in producing this work, especially the staff of the Translation Office. ✍

*Cultural Affairs Departmen*
**Ahl al-Bayt (*'a*) World Assembly**

# FOREWORD

We are thankful towards God, the Beneficent, that merely two terms after the first publication of the "Islamic Thought" textbook, the second edition of this book has been completed and thus we present it to our esteemed professors and students.

During this time, various gatherings of experts and professors of the Islamic sciences were formed in order to critique, analyze, and receive corrective and complementary opinions on the concepts and curriculum of the book. Additionally, opinion forms were given out to professors to gather their views and make necessary corrections.

Below is a summary of the proposed changes regarding the first edition:

1. Correction of the structure of the introduction and coordination of the introduction with the curriculum
2. Balancing the proportions of the first and second book
3. Consolidation of the proofs of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) in Book One
4. Addition of various contemporary *Kalām*[1] discussions related to the curriculum and the subjective concerns of students
5. Broadening the topic of religious administration and religious vicegerency [*wilāyah*]

In due regard to those who have graced us with their opinions, the Department of Research and Compilation of Textbooks of the Administration of Professors has made practical corrections to this series. Some of these corrections include:

1. Publication of the book in two separate volumes: The first volume, entitled "Islamic Thought: Book One", consists of topics concerning God, humanity, the world, and the afterworld. The second collection, entitled "Islamic Thought: Book Two", is comprised of the subjects of prophethood

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[1] *Kalam* is one of the religious sciences of Islam similar to dialectic theology. [trans.]

[*nubuwah*], Imamate, religious authority [*marja'īah*], and religious vicegerency [*wilāyah*]. The proportions of these books have been adapted to two study units each.

2. The structure of the introduction has been adapted to conform to the curriculum suggested by the Administration. This modified chapter has been named "*Religion in the Modern World*" which investigates the crises of modern humanity and related causes and factors and explains the function of religion in resolving these crises.
3. In the discussion concerning theology, while elucidating the methods of realizing God, the "*Kalām Cosmological Argument*" has been discussed in detail in the section entitled "*The Way of Intellect*".
4. The policy of the Administration regarding introduction of contemporary *Kalām* discussions into the book was to do so gradually while simultaneously observing the necessary symmetry of the topics. Therefore, issues such as religious experience, benefits of religion, science and religion, and polytheism [*kithrat girā'ī*] have been introduced and existing materials have been enhanced in the second edition.
5. In this edition, the discussions concerning eschatology [*ma'ād*] and Imamate have been revised and the discussions on Imamate have been broadened. Additionally, discussions on religious authority [*marja'īah*] and religious vicegerency [*wilāyah*] have been revised in order to increase content accuracy and adjust the volume of this discussion. Furthermore, we have endeavored to answer all questions concerning these topics.

In spite of all these changes, we believe that not everything required in a study book has been compiled within this series. Although addition of details such as context questions, explanation of important terms, and research topics and references for students was kept in mind, due to timetable issues we have deferred greater detail to a later date. We hope that, with the help of God, we may soon rewrite this book with improved content and also include current academic debates and better align this book with the characteristics of standard textbooks. Forwarding the opinions of professors, students, and experts will greatly help in quickly and easily creating a more favorable and exemplary book.

Finally, we wish to thank the esteemed authors of this book, Hujjat ul-Islām wa l-Muslimīn Alī Riḍā Amīnī, Doctor Muḥsin Javādī, Hujjat ul-Islām wa al-Muslimīn Amīr Dīvānī, and Doctor Muḥammad Sa'īdī-Mihr. We also wish to express our thanks to the respected editor Mr. Riḍā Bābā'ī and all those who helped type, correct, and prepare this compilation.

***Textbook Writing and Research Unit***
***Islamic Studies Professors and Courses Affairs Department***
**Office of the Supreme Leader in the Universities**

# Introduction: Religion in the Modern World

At the threshold of the third millennium, does modern humanity need religiousness and religious research any longer?[1] With the ascension of humankind to the heights of empirical knowledge, has the era of religious faith truly passed? Does the endless horizon of empirical research leave any room for religion? In the modern world, is religiousness a thing of superstition and religious research an obsolete and futile activity? In light of amazing scientific developments and through utilization of our collective intellect, has humanity truly been able to create their promised Paradise on this mundane globe and thus no longer needs to endeavor to gain access to a heavenly Paradise? Ultimately, has contemporary humankind been successful in attaining true beatitude and happiness through its accomplishments?

These and many similar questions are among the basic quandaries that face modern humanity. Particularly, religious people, who believe that religion affects their lives, seriously need to illuminate their positions regarding such questions. There is no doubt that the modern era lures religious people into uncertainty with its colorful and deceptive appearance. Many of those who have been seduced by the charm of materialistic civilization consider religion an ebbing current and eagerly await its sunset and finale. They regard religion as a phenomenon linked to the outdated traditions and bygone history of humanity, which like cuneiform and the Ptolemaic system, has reached its expiration date. According to this notion, religion does not have (or should not have) an important or irreplaceable role in the life of modern humanity and thus in modern times, religiousness is a thing of superstition and foolishness. Correspondingly, religious research (theoretical research concerning religion)—assuming that its usefulness and necessity is endorsed—must be limited to research in the context of psychology, sociology, history, and similar fields. In these studies, researchers must regard religion from an external perspective. For example, they must study the mental or social effects of religion or its historical evolution, without concerning themselves with examining the truths behind its claims or trying to understand and benefit from its teachings.

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[1] In the current discussion, by *religion* we mean divine monotheist religions that God has presented to humanity through His prophets throughout history. By *religiousness,* we signify devotion to religion and endorsing and having faith in its theoretical teachings and acting upon its practical teachings. Also by *religious research,* we mean theoretical research concerning religions and their teachings.

A superficial examination of the exterior appearance of modern human life and the astonishing results of modern technologies and industries, confirms the above notion or at least seems compatible with it. Nonetheless, more comprehensive, penetrating, and critical analyses of the condition of the world and the modern human[1] reveal the flagrant dramatization of the allegation that the era of faith has come to a conclusion and that modern humanity no longer requires religion. Even though many modern humans verbally deny need of religion, their condition states otherwise. Despite modern humanity's astounding developments in science and technology, it is faced with massive crises[2] that either possess completely new identities, or hold much more terrible and horrific features compared to their historic parallels. A thorough and chronicled explanation and clarification of these crises would be too long a narrative to cover in the limited pages of this introductory chapter. What can be covered in this synopsis is an overview and brief explanation of several aspects of this discussion.

Doubtless various cognitional, social, economic, etc. factors have been influential in creating and intensifying what we call *modern crises*. Correctly understanding these factors can be effective in more accurately comprehending these crises and their historic origins. Here we will suffice it to mention several of the most important factors that have caused the outbreak of modern crises and brought about an overall transformation of the ideas of modern humans about themselves and the world around them.

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[1] By *modern human,* we mean men and women who consider the characteristics of the new lifestyle established in the West in the last few centuries desirable, and align their lifestyle and culture with this "modern" way of life. Several of these characteristics are Humanism, Empiricism, Rationalism, escape from tradition and aversion to worship, Secularism, Liberalism, and modern technologies. Because Europe is the source of modernism, today many modernists live in the West, but this does not mean that all westerners are modernists or that no easterners are such.

2- By *crisis*, we mean fundamental and widespread problems whose escalation and prolongation can critically harm life and civilization in general.

## Rationalism[1]

The modern form of rationalism emerged in seventeenth century Europe through the contemplations of the famous French philosopher and mathematician, René Descartes (1596 – 1650) and was later advocated in the works of philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716). Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) set to critiquing pure reason and finally concluded that pure reason cannot prove the existence of God. He then endeavored to secure the foundations of intellectual belief in God based on ethics and practical reason. Additionally, he maintained that empirical truths (or objects per se), cannot be understood as they truly are, rather, we understand objects though previous concepts and categories within our minds. Although rationalist philosophers have presented differing philosophical systems, the common feature of modern day rationalism is that discursive or deductive reason is considered the most basic tool for understanding. Moreover, according to some of the more extremist narratives, reason can comprehend all fathomable things and nothing that reason cannot fathom is comprehensible.

The rationalist approach to religion, especially in the West and within Christianity, gradually deprived revelational theology [*ilāhīāt-e*

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1- In modern times, the word *reason* is used with several meanings, each of which must be elucidated. According to a rudimentary classification, two definitions may be noted. (1) According to the first definition, *reason* is an ability that identifies the natural world and relations between natural phenomena, assimilates the information gained through experience using logic, and reasons and deduces within these confines. *Reason*, according to this definition, mostly has an applicative and practical role because it is used as an instrument to alter the current conditions of the world in order to make them more desirable. Thus, this *reason* is usually called discursive reason, deductive reason, or practical reason. (2) According to the second definition, *reason* is the faculty that can analyze all phenomena—even paranormal facts—and can perceive general truths. Information gathered in this way is, in itself, valuable, and is not just a tool to better obtain ones practicable needs. In contrast to the first definition, this definition is called universal reason, intuitive reason, or pure reason. In the modern era, practical reason is mostly used to further technology and has no special relationship with the divine sciences. On the other hand, pure reason can have complete harmony with divine revelation and thus, pure reason is revered in religious texts.

*waḥyānī*] (theology based on divine texts) of its credibility. In this way, the seemingly unmatched rival of revelational theology—i.e. rational theology—was consolidated. Even so, sole reliance upon deductive reason and also the discovery of several limitations of reason as an instrument of cognition have caused new complications for rationalist theologians. For example, today, many western philosophers and theologians believe that religious teachings, including the existence of God, cannot be proven by reason. That being the case, they endeavor at least to demonstrate that accepting these teachings is not unreasonable.[1]

## Empiricism

Empiricism is an ideological movement that developed parallel to rationalism following the western Renaissance. Even though rationalism had a long record in the history of philosophy, empiricism ultimately surpassed rationalism. This neo-rationalist movement emerged through the innovative assertions of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) regarding the necessity of utilizing induction instead of deductive reasoning. Subsequently, distinctive forms of this school appeared in the philosophies of John Locke (1632 – 1704), George Berkeley (1685 – 1753), and David Hume (1711 – 1776). Positivism is also a form of twentieth century extremist rationalism.

The common element in the various narratives of extremist rationalism is that they all regard sensory experience as the only method of cognition and consider exterior senses the source of all human knowledge. Generally, rationalists have difficulty accepting the metaphysical teachings of religions because according to them the verity of these teachings cannot be established through sensory experience. The most severe opposition of contemporary rationalism with religion manifests in the criterion logical positivists propose regarding identification of meaningful statements. They allege that a meaningful statement is a statement that can be empirically analyzed. According to one description of the principle of empirical analysis, an empirically analyzable statement is a statement whose verity or falsehood can be demonstrated using specific practical conditions that can occur in the real world. According to this criterion, religious statements (and metaphysical and moral statements) essentially lack any cognitive meaning. Therefore, it is a waste of time to investigate the truth of these statements! Even though serious criticism of positivism in the first few decades of the twentieth century resulted in the loss of its original authority, there are still residues of positivist thought in some western philosophers.[1]

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[1] For more information, see Michael Peterson et al, *Reason and Religious Belief*, Chapters three and seven.

The two doctrines of rationalism and empiricism, despite their fundamental differences, are identical in one issue: they both view with skepticism all knowledge that is beyond the reason or the senses. Furthermore, they regard no credibility for the revelation sciences or intuition.

### Scienticism

Another one of the instigators of modern crises is the prevalence of scienticism upon the minds of many empiric scientists. According to this doctrine, which is an offshoot of empiricism in the domain of empirical knowledge, empirical knowledge is humanity's only reliable guide to the truth. Scienticism itself is without doubt a philosophical and epistemological belief that cannot be scientifically proven because no scientific experiment can be orchestrated showing that science is the only reliable method of attaining the truth.

It has been quite some time that science and scienticism have become one within the minds of many empirical scientists (physicists, biologists, psychologists, etc.). This unacceptable union has developed grounds for the encroachment of empirical science upon the territory of philosophy, metaphysics, and religion.

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1- For information on the positivist approach to theology, see ibid, pp. 260-269.

## Humanism[1]

Another aspect of the modern era is the dominance of humanist views. According to traditional thought, even though humans have an elevated standing in the world, they are still creations of God. Therefore, they must carry out their divine obligations. The traditional humans sought their truth and identity through their connection with God and realized perfection through servitude and intimacy with God. Whereas according to humanism, humanity is the center and basis of all truths and goodness; everything, even God and religion must be justified and interpreted through humanity; humans are egoistic and have no responsibilities towards anyone but themselves; and in order to gain profit they are permitted to use anything in every way possible. Influenced by humanism, modern humanity measures everything by human quantities and standards and thus, they have desecrated all things holy. According to René Guénon:

> "In the era of the Renaissance, one term has been subject to much reverence and credence and has beforehand epitomized the complete plan of modern civilization. This term is Humanism—a philosophy that considers humanity to be the criterion for the evaluation of all things. In truth, the intention for which this term is used is to limit all things according to human standards and measurements, and to make abstract all principles and doctrines containing spiritual and sublime characteristics. Indeed, it could be said as an exemplum that the intention was to turn our backs on the heavens with the excuse of having mastery over the world."[2]

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1- Humanism is a system of thought that places central emphasis upon humans and their capabilities, standing in the world, interests, and achievements. This doctrine has had various forms throughout history. (For example, philosophers such as Socrates, who instead of discussing cosmology and metaphysics brought moral, social, and political issues into philosophy, are called humanists.) In this discussion, we mean the approach that generally appeared in the West subsequent to the Renaissance. In this approach, humanity—rather than God—is the center of the universe and human talents are considered sufficient for humans to find their way in the world and achieve domination over nature.

2- René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*.

The aforementioned factors along with several additional factors such as liberalism and individualism—which are too comprehensive to discuss here—have united together to present humanity with a world full of crises, tension, and turmoil, albeit they do have some positive aspects. Crises and troubles in the modern world are so severe, abysmal, and extensive that we not only cannot consider modern humankind more happy and prosperous than traditional humans, in fact we find the situation to be exactly the opposite.

Here we must emphasize the fact that we do not deny the positive results of modern civilization—such as advancement in empirical science and technology or establishment of more complex (and sometimes more efficient) social systems—yet we believe that these developments have not helped modern humankind appreciably in its advance on the path of perfection and human bliss. Modern humankind, as opposed to traditional humankind, has become *more knowledgeable* (meaning they possess more information) and *more powerful* (meaning they have the capability to utilize nature and machines without limit), although this fact does not necessarily mean that they have become *more human*. In order to verify this assertion, we must make a brief inquiry into several crises that confront modern humanity.

## Cognition Crisis

Despite the awesome and rapid development of information[1], regarding knowledge, modern humanity is in a state that can be defined as *modern cognitional bewilderment*. The initial roots of this confusion in the modern era go back to the contemplations of Kant regarding the limits of human knowledge. Kant's philosophy and epistemology brought about a deep and frightening gap between the external world, the cognitive world, and human knowledge: humanity does not have direct access to the external world (empirical reality) and it is inevitable that everything we perceive from the world is understood through previous concepts and categories within our minds. In other words, we constantly see the world through the glasses

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1- Presently, the information available to humanity doubles every year. This accelerating process of data increase induced specialists to seek out new ways to store this unbelievable capacity of data.

of our minds. Therefore, humanity has no understanding of external objects, as they are in themselves.

Many of the philosophical doctrines and theories that appeared in the West after Kant's philosophy were influenced by the Kantian epistemology. Additionally, many of them had much influence in intensifying the knowledge confusion of modern humanity.

For example, recent studies in *hermeneutics* (the science of interpretation) showed that there can never be a complete understanding of the words or writings of others. As an additional example, contemporary developments in logic and epistemology brought about the appearance of new theories regarding the meaning and verity of a statement—thus further increasing confusion. In contrast to the traditional view that regarded any statement that conformed to reality true, in contemporary theories, "truth" has a completely different meaning. For instance, according to the *coherence theory of truth*, the truth of a statement depends on its congruity and accord with the rest of ones' beliefs; or according to the pragmatic theory of truth, essentially, a true statement is a statement whose merit becomes clear only through practical experience.

Furthermore, nowadays, the traditional theories about knowledge, which were mostly foundationalist, have gained powerful adversaries. According to several traditional foundationalist narratives, all statements are divided into two groups: axiomatic and theoretic. The credibility of theoretic statements is clarified with reference to axioms—which form the foundations of our knowledge—while axioms are regarded inherently true. Today, we are witness to the appearance of substitutive theories such as the *coherence theory of truth*. According to this theory, there are no basic statements in our knowledge structure which are the foundation of other statements; rather, the validity of our belief regarding a statement is based on its consistency with our other beliefs.

After encountering apparently impassable knowledge barriers in the domain of philosophy and metaphysics, modern humanity recovered their peace and tranquility in the empirical sciences. Yet not much time passed before it became apparent that what was considered with certainty to be an oasis was in fact a mirage. The escalating development in scientific knowledge resulted in swift substitution of rival theories. On the other hand, several scientific philosophers preformed in depth analysis of the nature of scientific theories and the role of mental and intellectual characteristics of scientists in the formation of these theories. It was soon revealed that empirical science is not the *place of solace* that the inquisitive minds of modern humans desired and for which they thoughtlessly refuted all metempirical cognition.

Today, the appearance of all manners of contradictory theories, especially in the humanities, has created a kind of confusion that can be called the "*Crisis of Trust*". Modern humans are rapidly loosing trust and confidence in empirical knowledge, for which, in the past few centuries following the development of scienticism, they substituted trust in religion and divine texts.

In any event, rationalism and empiricism in the modern world were not as successful in guiding modern humans towards trustworthy substitute sciences as they were in estranging them to the revelational sciences [*ma'ārif-e waḥyānī*].

## Moral Crises

Considering the fundamental connection of humanity and morality, the definition of humankind as a "*moral animal*" is not an exaggeration. From ancient times, human philosophers have contemplated and speculated about morals and morality. Throughout history, there existed people of virtue, who purified and improved their inner beings, and afterwards endeavored to reform the human world and instruct people in ethics.

In the modern era, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosophical contemplations of various western thinkers regarding ethics and its foundations have formed original discussions in the domain of moral philosophy, which are hypothetically valuable and noteworthy. Even so, this great scientific outcome not only had little effect on the growth and development of ethics—especially individual ethics—rather, to some extent, it brought about the instability of the principles and foundations of human ethics. Moral relativism, utilitarianism, and hedonism—at least in some narratives—have had a great share in the spread of moral degeneration. Moreover, the humanist and individualist views of various freethinkers have befouled the realm of moral thought to such an extent that history can find no parallel. In this realm, talk of exalted human virtues and merits, and encouraging humans to oppose their abject self—which has always been the basic principle of all moral teachings of divine religions and traditional moral doctrines—is considered completely meaningless. It is thus that some moral theorists have acquired the audacity to devise so-called moral principles for heinous acts such as homosexuality and child molestation.

The moral degradation of contemporary man is not specific to the uneducated masses; rather it has even afflicted many educated individuals. As an example, nowadays in many universities and institutions of higher education in western industrialized nations, there are official student homosexual clubs and despite the fact that they have not had much success in attracting students, they have much more promotional resources than other societies. In some of these countries, marriage of homosexuals is sanctioned by law, and the mass media and propaganda networks endeavor with all their might to justify and naturalize this issue. Widespread use of narcotics, hallucinatory drugs, and alcoholic drinks is another aspect of the moral decline of modern men, women and children, even in view of the fact that the destructive social and economic results of these substances are hidden to no one.[1]

The role of modern technology in the moral degradation of industrial societies cannot be overlooked. Nowadays a vast amount of the audiovisual products that are at the disposal of the public through telecast, satellite television, international computer networks (such as the Internet) are essentially immoral and desecrate even the holiest of moral principles. Many powerful world tycoons support the production and distribution of these programs in order to gain more wealth.

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[1] 1- According to the report of the American National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse half of those who are arrested are intoxicated with alcohol. One third of all homicides and one fourth of all suicides have been reported to be accompanied by consumption of alcohol. Sixty seven percent of all instances of child molestation and thirty nine percent of all instances of rape are accompanied by alcohol consumption… The use of alcohol causes the death of at least twelve thousand Spaniards every year… Experts claim that more than half of deaths in driving accidents are caused by alcohol… (Ja'far Sakhāvat, *Sociology of Social Deviations* (*Jāmi'ah Shanāsī-i Inḥirāf-i Ijtimā'ī*), pp. 113, 130.)

In the modern age, moral degradation has not only resulted in the decline of the spiritual aptitude of modern humans, it has greatly thrown their social existence into disarray. For example, today, in industrial societies the very foundations of family, which is the most primary social institution, are faltering. This is happening such that the number of people who live their entire lives or most of their lives as singles increases every day; a large number of children live with only one parent and many juveniles abandon their families and live their lives far from their homes.

Moreover, modern and intelligent instruments have given modern humanity the ability to recreate the inhuman catastrophes of history in a much more large-scale and severe manner and facilitate the justification of its actions with unprecedented skill. For instance, the production of advanced military armaments and modern weapons of mass destruction has given the axes of power the ability to take the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the blink of an eye without even suffering the least physical or financial harm. Additionally, slavery (which after centuries of struggle by the black peoples of the West was recently abolished in its traditional and undisguised form) continues in a new and obscure form. Every year, thousands of women and children who live in poor and underdeveloped countries are taken away from their homelands by human trafficking mafias and sold to the western rich and wealthy for their self-indulgence.

### Mental Crises

In recent times, there have been important advancements in psychiatry, psychology, and especially psychoanalysis. The experts of these sciences have analyzed the uncharted dimensions of the human mind and have thus uncovered some elements of the complex synergy between the human mind, environmental and genetic factors, and physiological characteristics. Nevertheless, the indisputable truth is that parallel to the development of human knowledge in this area, mental illnesses and abnormalities have also increased in industrial societies. Currently, many of the members of these societies are plagued by various forms of anxiety and mental pressure. Moreover, depression, in all its forms, has become an unsolvable problem. In order to treat these illnesses, many people have turned to synthetic medicine. Even when these drugs are successful in curing illness—because of their incompatibility with the natural structure of the human mind and body—they tend to cause new illnesses and abnormalities. In contemporary times, people suffer severely from a feeling of futility and lack of identity. The increase of the number of suicides, especially in industrial countries, is an obvious sign of the fact that a large portion of the society has despaired of their future, as a result, their feeling of unhappiness and defeat has left suicide as their only discernible alternative.

Even though communication among people has become much easier due to the growth of the communications industries, many people discover themselves completely alone and alienated, and can find no alternative to enduring the heavy weight of loneliness and estrangement.[1]

Why have the accomplishments of human knowledge regarding the human mind had little success in preventing or curing mental illnesses? We believe that the underlying problem is that essentially these sciences do not possess a realistic projection of the depths of humanity's being, their fundamental needs, or their wondrous abilities; and they mostly analyze the surface of human identity.

*Though jinn seem obscure,*
*Humanity is even more obscure than they*
*The wise know, though jinn are obscure,*
*Humans are a hundredfold more unknown*
*Pitiable humans have not fathomed themselves;*
*They came in abundance and left in poverty*
*Humans sell themselves cheap;*
*They are satin, but stitch themselves on coarse robes*[2]

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[1] According to a public poll in America in 1968, fifty-two percent of participants declared that they feel lonely and depressed. (see: Honolulu Advertiser, Nov. 20, 1968, p. A3)

2- گر چه به ظاهر آن پری پنهان بود     آدمی پنهان‌تر از پریان بود
نزد عاقل زان پری که مضمر است     آدمی صدبار خود پنهان‌تر است
خویشتن نشناخت مسکین آدمی     از فزونی آمد و شد در کمی
خویشتن را آدمی ارزان فروخت     بود اطلس، خویش را بر دلق دوخت

On the other hand, the absence of mental abnormalities in people who live away from the turmoil of modern civilization and live in comparatively simple social structures, shows that technological advancement and the social complexities and problems caused by this advancement have resulted in the emergence and expansion of mental crises in advanced industrial societies. Unfortunately, these crises are not limited to adults and teenagers; rather, nowadays, many children suffer from various mental abnormalities.[1]

### Technology

There is a seemingly endless history of humans using their scientific knowledge to build tools and utilize them. However, in recent centuries, parallel to the furtherance of practical sciences, a phenomenon called "*technology*" has appeared in industrial societies.[2]

Doubtless, modern technology has increased the material provisions of human livelihood and it has even brought about relative welfare and comfort in some areas. It also serves cultural and humanitarian aims. However, this is just one side of the coin. The other side reveals the destructive results and unfortunate effects of technology in various aspects of human life, such as culture, ethics, health, environment, etc.[3]

Modern technology forces its own culture and moralities upon advanced societies. Unlimited freedom in utilizing machines has shriveled the mentality of contentment and avoiding waste—which have been considered moral virtues for centuries. It has roused the fire of lust for lordship over nature in the hearts of modern human and thus has sown the seeds of the delusion of *self-sufficiency from Allah*, which is one of the most terrible plagues of ethics existent in the minds of humanity.[1] Colorful products, which are launched into the market every day by manufacturers and are placed at the disposal of consumers, enthrall and spellbind people to such an extent that they have forgotten issues that are more important. In the western societies, luxury products have caused the prevalence of the desire for diversity and vogue; all kinds of plagues and calamities have befallen humanity because of the development of these mentalities! The unbelievably vast amounts of information, which are at the disposal of humankind because of the development of the media industries, have confused and perplexed their cognitive systems to such an extent that nowadays reaching unity in thought is wistful thinking.

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[1] According to recent information, about six million American children suffer from depression. (Donald Mcnew, *Psychology of Stress*)

[2] *Technology* is the implementation of applied sciences—which have practical and industrial value—in the industries and arts.

[3] British philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russell, while indicating the plagues of technology, states: "Unlike religion, it [technology] is ethically neutral: it assures men that they can perform wonders, but does not tell them what wonders to perform. In this way it is incomplete. In practice, the purposes to which scientific skill will be devoted depend largely on chance. The men at the head of the vast organizations which it necessitates can, within limits, turn it this way or that as they please. The power impulse thus has a scope which it never had before... Ends are no longer considered; only the skillfulness of the process is valued. This also is a form of madness. It is, in our day, the most dangerous form, and the one against which a sane philosophy should provide an antidote..." (Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy*, p. 494.)

In recent decades, modern technology has instigated fundamental and far-reaching crises such as the *energy crisis* and the *environmental crisis*. The avarice of modern humans has caused unprecedented extravagance in the use of the limited energies of the Earth. Thus, the question has been brought up that in a world whose energy resources are not sufficient for its inhabitants, who has the right to live? Now that modern humans have mindlessly and wastefully exhausted so many of the gifts that God through nature has freely given them, it has suddenly come to their minds that perhaps future generations may also have a right in using these gifts!

It has been a while that the environmental problems caused by modern technology are being considered seriously. Even so, in industrial countries, many critics of technology severely doubt that humanity can save themselves from this menace.

The destruction of vast forests and grasslands, the pollution of extensive quantities of water resources of the Earth due to industrial drainage and oil wastes, the thinning of the ozone layer as a result of chemical contaminants, and the deadly air pollution in many megacities are some scenes from the tragic drama that humankind has written with its own hand and is in the process of performing!

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[1] As stated by the Holy Quran, the feeling of independence and self-sufficiency from God is the agent of insurrection and insubordination of humans toward Him:

(انَّ الإنسانَ لیطْغی! اَنْ رآه آستغنی')

*"Surely humans are rebellious; for they see themselves self-sufficient." (Sūrah 'Alaq, 96:6-7)*

On the other hand, the advancements in various branches of medicine and the development of pharmaceutical and hygiene industries have made diagnosis, prevention, and curing many illnesses simple. Nevertheless, the fact is that in this era, new and unidentified illnesses have spread whose dangers are no less than the dangers of illnesses whose cures have been found.

In any event, the beautiful snake of technology that modern man has nourished for some time has turned into a horrific fire-breathing dragon that is burning away blissful human life on Earth; furthermore, the insubordinate demon of industry is determined to crush all human values. Today, a question that has been reinforced in many minds is: Are machines the servants of humanity or its master? With the marvelous advancement of robot industries, a fear has risen in the hearts of many people that some day human-made robots may become completely independent and make them their slaves and subordinates![1]

## The Role of Religion in Solving Crises

That which we have discussed in complete brevity is only a small aspect of the problems and dead ends that modern humanity faces. Now, let us look anew upon the questions we posed at the beginning of this chapter and ponder their answers. In our opinion, the only correct answer to all these questions is a negative one.

During the last few centuries, modern humanity has taken quick and hasty steps to insure the elimination of religion, humanization of all divine aspects of their being, and desecration of all things holy. Then they drunkenly bellowed throughout the world of their independence and self-sufficiency from religiousness and belief in God and arrogantly declared the end to the era of religion and religious spirituality. Now, at the periphery of the twenty-first century, it has

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1- This fear is so extensive that is has become the subject of many acclaimed science fiction movies.

come time to awaken from the deep sleep of negligence that has embraced us for centuries; discern the oasis from the mirage; stop endeavoring towards our doom; stop driving through the byways of aberration; open an aperture towards the light; and clear the visions of our eyes and hearts.

A comprehensive account of all that religiousness can do to solve the crises of modern humanity necessitates extensive research and a lengthy volume. Nevertheless, what we can say in brief is that, even if we cannot say all, at least a large portion of these crises will be eliminated through humanity's return to the bosom of religion and their connection with religious spirituality.

## Religion and the Knowledge Crisis

According to religious teachings, the methods that humans use to obtain knowledge are not limited to sensory input and experience; rather, divine revelation, and reason (especially universal reason that can cognize metaphysical issues) are also complementary sources for human understanding. By relying on these complementary sources, humanity can realize a more solid and complete set of truths. By disclosing unerring truths about God, humanity, and the world, religions based upon revelation provide us with a secure pillar of understanding and wider horizons for thought. Many truths—such as metaphysical issues or truths about the past and future of the world—can never be realized through sensory experience. Our need for knowledge about these issues can only be fulfilled through divine revelation. In the thought process of a religious person, religion and reason attain a blessed and productive union; reason reinforces the theoretical principals of religious beliefs and religion, by breaking the barriers of metaphysics, reminds us of the limits of reason and prepares the way for humanity's ascent to higher apexes. Intuition of divine truths—that has various forms and arises through one's deep connection with religious spirituality—establishes a secure foundation for humanity's beliefs and frees them from the clutches of absolute skepticism and cognitional bewilderment.

In brief, it is always possible for religious people to harbor the windswept ship of their thoughts, which has been caught in the maelstrom of bewilderment and skepticism, at the calm shores of *faith* [*'īmān*]. Naturally, by this assertion we do not mean that religious persons are instantly freed from bewilderment. This is because the domain of metaphysics at least, is a confusing domain—the highest forms of bewilderment pertain to the miracles of prophets and Gnostics. Actually, we mean that persons who open themselves to religious guidance never feel *absolute bewilderment* in such a way that they become bereft of all reliable intellectual footholds. Religious wonderment is harmonious with faith and absolute certitude towards God, as opposed to modern cognitional bewilderment that negates all certainty and trust.

### Religion and Moral Crises

Religion has always been a strong supporter of ethics and thus a significant amount of religious teachings are related to ethics. The link between religion and ethics is so deep that some essentially regard religion and ethics one and the same. The foundations for religious ethics cannot be found in social conventions, utilitarianism, or hedonism; however, by perfectly defining the connection between humans and their Creator and between humans and perfection and true beatitude, religion shapes the divine foundations of moral norms. Of course, the role of religion in ethics is not limited to providing religious teachings based upon divine principles regarding the essence of humankind. The teachings concerning the absolute knowledge of God and His ceaseless and everlasting supervision upon the thoughts and actions of humans establish the most secure *executive guaranty* for moral regulations, in both personal and social aspects of ethics.

### Religion and Mental Crises

Doubtless, portions of the theoretic principles of modern mental crises have resulted from humanity's inverted ideology towards their essence, faculties, abilities, and ultimate destination (telos). According to modernist thought, humans are creatures that, like all other creatures, have risen out of the heart of nature and have reached their current state through biological evolution; moreover, their only conceivable destination is material advancement and further domination over the natural world, whereas the religious ideology towards humanity is completely incompatible with this perspective. Religion draws a different picture of humanity's genesis and journey's end. The human race, which is God's chosen and special creation, has unlimited capacity and the ultimate purpose of its creation is advancement in spirituality and intimacy with the divine Oneness. It is clear that such an ideology can result in a completely different confrontation with crisis—including spiritual and mental crises—producing elements. For example, by virtue of this ideology, humans can endure even the most difficult troubles in life because they regard them as preparatory measures for reaching their ultimate destination. Such persons, while battling their problems and endeavoring to reach their goals, feel satisfaction and contentment in the depths of their soul concerning the outcome—whatever it may be—because they regard it as divine decree.

One's faith towards religious teachings about God, humanity, his genesis and destination (eschatology) has an important role in preventing and curing mental abnormalities. Moreover, many psychologists and psychoanalysts have confirmed this role. For instance, Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), the prestigious Swiss psychoanalyst, has declared:

> "Among all my middle-aged patients…there was not even one whose problem was not the problem of finding a religious ideology towards life. Surely the reason for all of their illnesses was that they lacked that which living religions of all ages present to their followers; none of them was truly able to recover without recovering their religious beliefs."[1]

Yea, persons who have faith in the divine destination of their souls never feel meaningless or causeless. Those who believe in the existence of the Sublime God and His divine qualities—Power, Mercy, Absolver of Sins, etc.—and trust in Him, never despair. Those who calm their heart through remembrance of their Beloved God are less troubled by anxiety and stress. The loving connection of humanity and God never leaves much room for feeling loneliness and isolation; rather, whenever the sorrow of worldly isolation overcomes such people, they relieve it with fellowship with their Beloved.

### Religion and the Technology Crisis

The technology crisis originates not from its essence, but from its ungovernability. Even though the fact that humans have the ability to build machines and utilize them is inherently a type of perfection and virtue, the true plague of technology is in the construction of anything that can possibly be constructed and utilization of these constructs in any way conceivable without establishing reasonable restrictions. As we have indicated, the report card of modern humans—who do as they please—shows that they have uncontrollable avidity and unending voracity towards building and utilizing machines, such that social conventions and political commitments cannot limit this urge. Consequently, there is need of an alternative restrictive factor.

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[1] Carl G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 284.

We believe that religious teachings—provided that they become the governing factor in people's actions—can easily restrain the 'demon' of technology. By displaying the true status of humanity within the universe, its strengths and weaknesses and its rights and obligations, religion sets the conditions and limits for utilizing machines. Religious individuals do not consider their perfection to be in absolute utilization of technology; therefore, they acquiesce to a set of limits and rules. For example, according to religious ideology, exercising restraint in consumption of energy is obligatory, even where there are seemingly unlimited energy resources and, in contrast to several modernist views, energy usage in itself cannot be considered a sign of advancement or an indicator of development.

Basically, according to religious ideology, domination over nature is not a value as such; rather, it is a tool for bringing out humanity's divine potentials and this purpose must establish the manner of machine utilization and draw the limits for technology. When in religious texts it is said that the world is the dominion of humanity, this does not mean that individuals are able to act without restriction; on the contrary, they are limited to the conditions and specifications defined in religious teachings. Religion regards the world as a divine proof and blessing; therefore, it deems the world worthy of respect and veneration. In various religious teachings, observing the rights of plants and animals is ardently advised.

In short, for religious humans, spiritual values have first priority and thus, while they regard technology advancement as an ideal, they endeavor to utilize it for moral and humane objectives, and if at any time they realize that this "*preliminary*" does not serve their purpose, they sacrifice the preliminary for divine purposes. Religious humans, as opposed to modern humans, never foster the motive of godhood over the Earth; rather, they regard themselves as the vicegerent of God on Earth and therefore consider themselves responsible for the preservation and maintenance of their natural surroundings.

Thus far, we have presented a short narrative of the lengthy adventures of the human race in the modern era. We believe that modern crises and fundamental problems, some of which we have described in short, shall sooner or later reveal unto humanity the mirage-like truth of modernism and result in their endeavoring to return to religion and religious spirituality.

As might be expected, in the meantime, religious people have a great responsibility. Two of the most basic duties of all religious intellectuals and those who are sympathetic towards their religion are:

a. Analytic examination of religious references in order to deepen and extend religious knowledge

b. Presentation of life-giving religious teachings in a modern form, albeit preserving their originality, in a manner that can answer the diverse needs of modern society

# Chapter One

# GOD, HUMANITY, AND THE WORLD

Section One: **In Search of the Object of Devotion**
Section Two: **The Path to Him**
Section Three: **Anthropology**
Section Four: **Cosmology**

## Section One

# In Search of the Object of Devotion

### History of Worship

Believing in a Divine Origin and worshiping Him is one of the oldest aspects of human life. Historical research conducted by archaeologists and anthropologists has revealed that even primitive humans who lived thousands of years before the first civilization was formed had deep religious and metaphysical beliefs, such as belief in divine spirits and life after death. It seems that from the dawn of history humanity has inherently known that they have not been forsaken in this vast existence; rather, they are under the influence and authority of metaphysical entities and powers that preside over their existence and have a part in their destiny.

The drawings discovered in ancient caves, statues and various ornaments that have been found in underground excavations or deep within caves are all testimonies to the existence of various religious beliefs. Moreover, the remains of the dead, the method of their burial, and the existence of animal skulls, weapons, and valuable artifacts alongside the bodies are all proof of the fact that ancient humans, in some way, believed in life after death.

According to Islamic thought, humans innately seek and believe in God; in other words, they have an innate predisposition towards worshipping God and also possess a type of inborn cognition of Him. However, because this cognitive predisposition is not adequate for perfect worship and understanding of God, holy prophets have been appointed among various peoples throughout history in order to perfect this innate guidance and enlighten humankind in theology, self-knowledge, and the relationship between "God, humanity, and the world" and thus bring forth the fruits of human intellect and nature.

The holy prophets have always enjoined worship of the One Divine God—*divine* meaning that He is superior to and exempt from the natural and material world. Thus, in proportion to the influence that this invitation to worship has fostered in each person, humanity's beliefs in general have been fluctuating between the boundaries of monotheism and polytheism.[1] This fluctuation has resulted in a wide-ranging spectrum of theological beliefs among earlier nations and societies even after emergence of the prophets. Naturally, because polytheism [*shirk*] and idolatry, in contrast to pure monotheist beliefs, have material qualities and effects—such as worship of idols, stones, animals, etc.—it is only logical that historic analysis should come across more signs of these beliefs. Because monotheism is less material, historic analysis should be able to demonstrate the radices of monotheism in human history to a much lesser degree. Even so, this truth does not make "*monotheism*" insignificant or marginal.

## The Perfection and Excellence of Islamic Theology

In any event, for various reasons that are too extensive to include in this exposition, the long history of religion—generally speaking—has been witness to an astonishing diversity concerning religious beliefs and religious customs of various peoples. Apart from monotheist views, the diversity of polytheistic and henotheistic[2] religions has overwhelmed humanity with its profuseness. According to Islamic tradition, Islamic teachings in theology and other branches of religious studies, such as eschatology, are the most complete religious teachings at our disposal. Contemplation of the profundity of Islamic theological teachings is enough to prove this claim. Nevertheless, it is obvious that understanding the importance, profundity, and richness of Islamic theology can only be complete when Islamic beliefs are compared with those of other religions and sects, especially mundane religions

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1- One of the much-discussed issues among historians of religion is the question of whether, historically, monotheism predates polytheism or vice versa? According to religious references, indisputably after the appointment of the first prophet [the prophet Adam], monotheist belief existed among humans and after that, monotheism and polytheism endured in parallel and thus some people were monotheists and others were polytheists.

2- Henotheism refers to belief in a superior god who has delegated a portion of the affairs of the universe to other gods and goddesses. Polytheism—general meaning intended—also encompasses this belief, but if we use polytheism in parallel to henotheism—with the particular meaning of belief in several gods—then these two definitions may be considered synonymous.

and beliefs. This comparison, if preformed with contemplation and impartiality, can effectively reveal the excellence of Islamic theology.

## A Glimpse of Mundane Religious Theology

There is no reliable and accurate knowledge concerning the religious lifestyle of ancient humans. Research on this subject has its own particular problems. Nevertheless, today, we have acquired some information on this subject through archeological research and analysis of the beliefs and religious ceremonies of contemporary primitive tribes. According to recent findings in archeology and anthropology, there are common elements in most primitive religions that exist with little variation in contemporary uncivilized and primitive tribes.

A common practice among ancient humans was veneration and glorification of various plants and animals. Religious historians term this plant or animal "*Totem*" and call veneration of these objects "*Totemism*". Each of these primitive tribes worshiped a specific totem or group of totems and sometimes worshiped a particular animal that they believed to be one of their ancestors. They believed that totems had an occult power called "*Mana*" which made them worthy of veneration and glorification. Therefore, they strongly avoided harming or eating these totems and believed that the spirit within the totem protected them. Sometimes totems were chosen out of fear (lions and snakes for example) and sometimes beauty and exquisiteness were the grounds for worship (peacocks and gazelles for instance). Totem worshipers endeavored to make themselves resemble their totems.

Other than glorification of plants and animals, various lifeless objects were also sacred; such an object is termed "*Fetish*". Fetishes were venerated by various primitive clans and were taken on battles and hunts. Natural fetishes (non-manufactured) such as pebbles, unusual and rare pieces of wood, and meteor stones usually had strange and singular shapes and were considered sources of magical powers. Later, among more advanced peoples who were able to fashion metal objects, worship of manufactured fetishes became common and gradually transformed into a form of idolatry.

Parallel to belief in holy objects, plants, and animals, a kind of "*Animism*" was prevalent. Animism is the belief that various aspects of nature have independent souls and spirits that can influence human destinies. In addition, wholehearted belief in sorcery and magic and avoidance of specific objects due to the belief that they had occult powers are several other beliefs and customs that were to some extent existent among primitive tribes.

These facts show that affinity and dependency towards a superior power and the inclination to venerate and worship this power has commonly prevailed in a simple and rudimentary manner among ancient humans. However, this primitive feeling and inclination—influenced by factors such as imagination, ignorance, lack of knowledge, fear and insecurity, etc.—manifested itself in the form of the worship of special objects, plants, and animals. In other words, ancient humans were very far from the intellectual maturity they required to receive divine knowledge concerning cognition of the source, administration, and design structure of existence.

Subsequent to prehistoric eras, history was gradually witness to the formation of great civilizations in various parts of the world. In this era, main elements of tribal religions endured, although sometimes they acquired "modern" forms. For example, belief in totems and fetishes, and also idolatry and animism transferred over to newly established civilizations in various forms. As well, these civilizations were the sources of new forms of theism such as polytheism and henotheism.

Ancient Egyptians evolved through all the phases of rudimentary religions, such as totemism and animism, and finally tending towards multitudes of gods, they became absolute polytheists. They regarded the Egyptian pharaohs as the offspring of the Sun and considered them to possess some form of divinity. The erectors of the Egyptian pyramids designated the pharaohs as Sons of Ra (the Egyptian sun god), and built in their names pyramids whose shapes are allegories of the rays of the Sun.

Sun worship was commonplace among ancient Sumerians. The name of their sun god was Shamash. Inanna was their great goddess of cities, plants, and fertility. Each Sumerian god resided at a specific temple where it was worshiped. In addition to belief in multiple gods, the Sumerians also believed in mythological creatures and spirits. In the second age of Sumerian civilization, the Babylonian-Assyrian period, there were numerous gods with similar names.

In the most ancient religious texts of the Hindu civilization—the Vedas—gods are described in human forms. In its initial form, Hinduism includes the two elements of nature worship and polytheism. The Vedic gods, great and small, were elements and aspects of nature that had gained divinity. The common characteristics of these gods included possessing human forms, compassionate natures, immortality, and lack of individuality. In addition, the followers of Buddha deified him after his death and gradually, many other gods became objects of their worship.

According to the ancient Chinese, the world is under the dominion of "*Shangdi*" meaning 'Above Sovereign'. In some narrations, the creation of humanity is attributed to Shangdi. An army of gods governed affairs under the authority of Shangdi because he was too great to attend to the problems of mortal beings. There is no complete list of these gods. A group of the Chinese gods guarded the people's homes and thus every Chinese house was believed to contain both celestial and worldly inhabitants.

In ancient Greece, polytheism was rampant. Every family had their own god and the fires in their ovens constantly burned in the name of these gods. Offering food to the gods was one of the most prevalent religious ceremonies in people's homes. In addition to the god that each family had, each tribe, clan, and city worshiped their own specific god. The Greeks' religious imagination, by extending beyond their own locality, formed the common mythologies and gods of ancient Greece. The Greek people had a god for every aspect of nature and society, worldly and celestial powers, good and evil, various affairs, etc.

In Rome, people believed in numerous spirits—those who lacked a specific form or independent personality. They would beseech some of these spirits for prosperity in agriculture and harvest. Others were venerated and deified within familial circles. There were innumerable official Roman gods who had special priests in government temples and who were worshiped with special customs and rites.

In pre-Zoroastrian Iran, the "*Magian*" belief was popular. This belief propagated dualism and belief in a god of good and a god of evil. Zoroaster corrected this belief after his appearance and altered the beliefs of Iranians from polytheism towards monotheism.

According to what was said, we can identify a set of religious and ideological principles and elements that are more or less common in all religions described.

1) As we have established, in these religions, instead of One God, there were numerous gods. Sometimes the number of these gods would increase in proportion to cities, tribes, and even families. Therefore, the theology of these religions must be described as an extreme version of polytheism, which is very distant from pure monotheistic thought.

2) The incarnations of these gods were natural elements, celestial bodies, various animals, and even particular people and thus were not divine beings but merely aspects of nature.

3) These gods were subject to much change as a result of social progress, wars, encounters with neighboring civilizations, etc.; insomuch that at times, following these factors, a god would lose his former glory or a goddess who had no previous status would join the ranks of important and official gods!

4) Occasionally, a number of gods, who were products of the fantasies and imaginations of their worshipers, would combine and bring about a new god who was an amalgam of the traits and attributes of the previous gods.

5) Among most peoples, various prevalent mythologies about gods spoke of childbearing, combining, and internal battles among gods! The pinnacle of these mythologies can be found within the ancient Greek civilization, especially in the epics of Homer and Hesiod.

6) The majority of these gods were not divine and incorporeal beings. In fact, they had humanlike personalities and they were confined by human characteristics and relationships, such as reproduction, marriage, and paradoxically death.

7) Often, governing the affairs of nature was divided among gods and each one was the custodian of one or several natural processes, such as the wind and rain, and were heeded and beseeched only in their specific domains.

Today it has become apparent to most people that the gods of ancient peoples are in no way worthy of worship and cannot answer our innate longing to worship a divine and holy being. Nevertheless, the prevalence of the worship and veneration of these gods among ancient peoples reveals a fundamental need—the need to worship, venerate, feel dependant upon, and have a link with a superior being—in the depths of our soul; a need that has been fulfilled to perfection by the Islamic religion.[1]

## Why Theology?

At first, we might see ourselves faced with this fundamental question: "What is the importance and necessity of endeavoring to understand God and what role does this understanding have in our personal and social lives?"

In order to answer this question, we must first recount several issues:

A short reflection upon the individual and social characteristics of the lives of those around us reveals the fact that there is a fundamental difference between the lives of believers and unbelievers. Additionally, two people who each has a differing view of their God do not live in the same manner. This is because our belief in God, understanding of God's traits, and relationship with God—especially when these beliefs become imbued into our souls and we wear the raiment of faith [*īmān*]—have a profound effect upon the various aspects of our lives. Humanity's understanding of their creator

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1- Several recommended references for supplementary reading:

1.Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Trans. Philip Mairet. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
2.Eliade, Mircea, *History of Religions*, University of Chicago, 1969.
3.Eliade, Mircea, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.
4.Nass, John B., *The Comprehensive History of Religions*.
5.Hume, Robert A., *The World's Living Religions*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959.
6.Tūqifī, Hussaīn, *Āshnā'ī bā Adiyān-e Buzurg (Introduction to the Great Religions)*, Simat Foundation and Ṭāḥā Cultural Institute, Qum, AH 1372.
7.Hikmat, 'Alī Asghar, *Tārīkh-e Adiyān (History of Religions)*, Ibn Sīnā Publications, Tehran, AH 1345.
8.Zarrīn Kūb, 'Abdul Hussaīn, *Dar Qalamruw-e Vijdān (In the Domain of Conscience)*, Surūsh Publications, Tehran, AH 1357.

influence their motives and causes, desires and ambitions, thought and speech, and actions and behavior. This understanding gives their lives direction, and it bestows upon them special identities. Therefore, walking the path of theology and understanding God is not just a scientific endeavor to answer several questions of our inquisitive minds; rather, it is a movement towards choosing a special way of life and manner of living.

Indeed, belief in and love of God has never been an easily overlooked, subsidiary, or inferior issue. Persons who wish to strengthen the pillars of their lives upon the foundation of reason and sagacity would never allow themselves to neglect this matter. Belief in God is a fundamental issue in religious life, and it is not possible to make an informed decision about the best way of life without correct and comprehensive understanding of religious life.

History also supports the importance of theology. As far as historical facts show, enquiry concerning the source of existence and the creator of the world has always been one of the main concerns of thoughtful humanity. Additionally, theological opinions and beliefs, and discussions about existence and God's attributes have greatly helped the general and historical culture of humankind.[1]

## The Methods of Realizing God

It is befitting that we commence our discussion on the methods of realizing God with two definitions. Two fundamental stages can be identified concerning understanding God: 1. *Cognizance of the*

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[1] From long ago, Islamic philosophers [*mutakallimīn*] have emphasized two main principles that demonstrate the necessity of endeavoring to know and understand God.

i. *Countering probable loss*: Any wise person accepts the probability that they might be punished if they do not abide by religious teachings. Because reason demands the prevention of harm—albeit by *possible* punishment—it is absolutely necessary that humans inquire into the existence of God and His attributes so that if God truly exists and the call of the prophets is true, they can free themselves of divine punishment by following the divine teachings.

ii. *Necessity of thanking one's benefactor*: There is no doubt that the many gifts and blessings that we enjoy have been given to us by a benefactor. Furthermore, logic dictates that we thank our benefactors. Because thanking others is not possible without first knowing who they are, reason demands that we endeavor to understand our true benefactor—i.e. God.

*existence of Allah*, 2. *Cognition of Divine attributes and actions and the relationship of Allah with humanity and the world.* In the first stage, one realizes that "*Allah is*". This realization separates one from the ranks of atheists and agnostics, and joins him with the ranks of believers. Next, one enters the second stage, becomes acquainted with God's attributes, and identifies God's relationship with all creatures of the world. This stage consists of an endless path that each believer can only partially traverse depending upon his capacity.

In order to avoid mistaking these two fundamental stages with each other, we will term the first stage "*realizing Allah*" and the second stage "*understanding Allah*".

From one perspective, we can place the most important methods of realizing God in three categories: *the way of the heart, the way of experience*, and *the way of reason.*[1]

## I. The Way of the Heart

Sometimes through introspection, without needing logical deduction or empirical observation, humans realize their Creator and thus reach their Beloved by way of heart. The starting point of this path is *innate [fiṭrī]* realization of God, which is also called *the way of nature [fiṭrat]*. The advanced stages of this method pertains to a special group of mystics and illuminated Gnostics; through sincere worship, self-purification, and self-edification, these individuals observe the mighty and beautiful Divine attributes through the vision of their souls.

By studying the lives of devoted believers, it is apparent that many of them have realized and understood their Creator by way of their hearts; their religious faith is a robust tree that is watered from the spring of intuition. As a result of suitable circumstances and absence of impediments, the God-seeking and God-believing nature of many individuals matures and flourishes. These individuals feel the presence of their Lord with their hearts and souls and discover within themselves their deep-rooted dependence on the Divine Origin. Through mysticism, some of these individuals endeavor to lift the veils between themselves and God, which arise through their egocentricity and self-importance, thereby attaining the rank in which they may observe Almighty God through the vision of their souls and thus meet their Lord [*liqā' allāh*].

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[1] It must be mentioned that this and similar classifications are categorized by taking into account the general methods that we realize God. However, if we consider the personal and individual attributes of these methods, it must be said that all persons are unique, and realize and understand their creator in their own distinctive way. According to this perspective, there are innumerable ways of realizing and understanding God.

In describing intuition, Mawlānā (Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī) has written:

> *The purity of the mirror is a description of the heart;*
> *The heart which is worthy to display the countenance of the Divine Infinite.*
> *The Divine infinite countenance of the Invisible;*
> *Miraculously shined from the collar of Moses through the mirror of his heart.*
> *The divine countenance of Allah cannot be contained in the heavens;*
> *Nor even in the Empyrean nor in the earth nor in the sea nor in fish.*
> *For these are all limited and countable;*
> *But know that the mirror of the heart has no limit.*
> *Sanctified mystics who have cleansed themselves of all scent and color (ego);*
> *See beauty every moment without pause.*
> *The reflection of no image endures forever;*
> *Except for images both spiritual and mundane that radiate from the heart.*
> *From the time the images of the seven Heavens shined upon the hearts of humans;*
> *Their hearts have been seeking Heaven.*
> *They are superior to the Heavens and the Throne of Allah;*
> *The inhabitants of the true sanctuary of Allah.*
> *They possess many signs from Allah, even so they are absolutely obscure;*
> *What are mere signs; they are in fact united with Allah.*[1] (Book I)

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[1] آن صفای آینه وصف دل است     صورت بی منتها را قابل است
صورت بی صورت بی‌حد غیب     زآینه دل تافت بر موسی ز جیب
گرچه این صورت نگنجد در فلک     نی به عرش و فرش و دریا و سمک

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In addition, Hafiz recites:

> *There exists no partition between lovers and the object of their love,*
> *You, yourself are your own shroud Hafiz, arise from the midst.*[1]

A person asked, "O, Commander of the Faithful! Have you seen your Creator?" *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*[2] ('a)—the originator of mysticism and leader of all mystics—declared in indication of intuitive and inner understanding of God, "Should I worship something that I have not seen?"

The person then asked, "How do you see Him?" The Imam answered: "Eyes do not see Him manifestly, but hearts realize Him through the reality of faith."[3]

Those who have attained this status do not seek their Lord through other methods, such as the way of reason or experience, because they have realized Him with their whole beings; what else could one who has found what he has sought desire? Such intuitive people believe that immersing themselves in the observation of God's creations or logical reasoning hinders union with the Beloved and appealing to anything but God in order to prove His existence is improper. The condition of this group is similar to what is uttered in the prayer (*munājāt*) of Imam Hussein ('a):

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زانکه محدود است و معدود است        آن آینه دل را نباشد حدّ بدان
اهل صیقل رسته‌اند از بو و رنگ        هر دمی بینند خوبی بی درنگ
عکس هر نقشی نتابد تا ابد        جز ز دل هم بی‌عدد هم با عدد
تا نقوش هشت جنت تافته است        لوح دل‌شان را پذیرا یافته است
برترند از عرش و کرسی و خلا        ساکنان مقعد صدق خدا
صد نشان دارند و محو مطلق‌اند        چه نشان بل عین دیدار حق‌اند
(دفتر اول)

1- میان عاشق و معشوق هیچ حایل نیست        تو خود حجاب خودی حافظ از میان برخیز

2- Amīr al-Mu'minīn (meaning Commander of the Faithful) is the title of Imam 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālīb ('a). [trans.]

3- *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, Sermon 179.

> "O He whom I worship! When I consider each of the tokens of Your power in order to understand You, the path to union with You grows far... How can I prove Your existence through things that rely upon You for their existence? Is there any being besides you that has a manifestation that is not Your doing, which can manifest You? When have You become hidden that You must need a guide to show me the way to You? And when have You been apart from me to make it necessary that your creations bring me to You? Blind is the eye that does not see You, while You have always been its companion!"[1]

*When have You left my heart that I must plea for You?*
*When have You become hidden that I must seek You?*[2]

Naturally, even though the path of the heart is the most complete method of realizing God, it is not the only method of doing so. The state of many people is such that other methods, for example, contemplation of God's creations or logical reasoning can benefit them more and thus traveling these paths can help them realize, albeit to a lesser degree, the true Object of Devotion.

## Religious Experience

The term *religious experience* has gained a special place in modern theological discussions in the West during the past two centuries. This term, at least in some narratives, has an absolute relationship with what we entitled "*realizing Allah by way of heart*". Of course, in contrast to what western philosophers of religion depict, religious experience is not specific to the presence and manifestation of God; rather, it often happens that the experiencer cognizes the presence of a metaphysical being or a person who has a special relationship with God (such as the prophets). In this discussion, we will take a brief glimpse at the subject of religious experience and the debates that it has initiated among various thinkers and philosophers, especially in the western world.

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[1] The Prayer (*du'ā*) of the day of 'Arafah.

[2] کی رفته‌ای ز دل که تمنا کنم ترا      کی بوده‌ای نهفته که پیدا کنم ترا

Even though various aspects of the issue of religious experience have been controversial, there is relative unanimity concerning the existence of such experiences. Religious experience is not religion specific; on the contrary, it is observed in various forms among the followers of diverse religions—encompassing Moslems, Christians, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists. Many people attest that in specific circumstances they have felt the presence of God or a divine being. Sometimes these experiences are visual, such as when one sees the visage of holy people—such as prophets and saints [*awliyā' ilāhī*]—and sometimes persons go deep into a spiritual and mystical state such that they achieve a form of ecstasy and experience the divine kindness, love, and providence of God. Dreams and spiritual calls are also specific forms of religious experience.

Additionally, gnostic inspiration is considered a form of religious experience. In the higher degrees of these revelations, the individual attains a state of unified mystical knowledge, meaning that the knowledge of the individual loses all attachment—through meditation and severe asceticism, the mystic individual strips all concepts, beliefs, and feelings from his mind to the point that only pure knowledge remains.

When confronted with the definition of religious experience, fundamental questions have arisen within the minds of religious philosophers and theologists: What are the historical factors and cultural foundations for the manifestation of these experiences? Basically, what is the essence of religious experience? Do the extremely diverse religious experiences that are observed among the followers of various religions have a common core? How much does the religious belief of an individual influence his interpretation of his religious experiences? Finally, can religious experience be considered a secure basis for authenticating religious beliefs and customs—including belief in God?

Varying answers to these questions have given rise to diverse viewpoints concerning religious experience. For example, there are disparate interpretations and analyses concerning the essence of religious experience. According to one interpretation, religious experience is a sort of feeling that is attained without the intermediation of concepts and judgments and only through personal cognition. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), William James (1842 – 1910), and Rudolf Otto (1869 – 1937) are several renowned supporters of this viewpoint. James declared, "I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."[1]

In addition, Rudolf Otto believed that there is an aspect of God that reason can comprehend. We can allegorically attribute characteristics such as purposefulness, absolute power, and possession of personal identity to God. Nevertheless, regarding the deeper degrees of God's essence (meaning God's Holiness), God cannot be understood by reason; He is indescribable. We must realize the Holiness of God with something beyond reason (such as feeling). According to Otto, this feeling has various forms:

> "The feeling [of an awesome secret] may sometimes enter swiftly like a delightful breeze and suffuse the soul with a tranquility derived from the deepest layers of worship. This feeling may transform into a more stable and permanent spiritual state… It may appear suddenly like an eruption from the depths of the soul and be accompanied by intense rapture and tremors, or result in an extremely singular exhilaration, senseless rapture, ecstatic state, and entrancement."[2]

Schleiermacher believed that the fundamental essence of religion is a sort of *feeling of absolute dependence*:

> "…The essence of religiousness is this: knowledge of absolute dependence, or in other words, knowledge of one's relationship with God."[3]

Based on this, Schleiermacher extremely opposed the transition and referral of religion to theology, metaphysics, or ethics.

According to another viewpoint, religious experience is a sort of sensory perception and therefore its general attributes are the same as all other sensory perceptions. One of the most prominent advocates of

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1- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: The Modern Library, 1902, p. 44.

2- *Reason and Religious Belief* (*'Aql wa I'tiqādi Dīnī*), p. 42.

3- F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928.

this viewpoint is William Alston. By analyzing the reason that our confidence in the data gathered by our senses is logical, Alston shows that religious experiences are also logical and credible on the same grounds.

A third group believes that alleged religious experiences are experiences that can only be understood through the minds of their owner, based on their beliefs and religious teachings, even though these religious experiences may in truth lack any metaphysical cause. According to this belief, religious experiences are nothing more than the evolution of the experiencer's prior beliefs and ideology and therefore can be explained using empirical sciences without the intercession of metaphysics.

Regardless of the theoretical discussions and difference of opinions regarding religious experience, the important fact is that religious experience, at least for some contemporary western thinkers, is a doorway to understanding God and His attributes and acquaintance with metaphysical layers of existence. It is a path that does not require theoretical concepts and dry theoretical reasoning, and only utilizes the personal intuition of the experiencer. Today, a number of the most prominent contemporary western religious philosophers (such as William Alston and Richard Swinburne) are occupied with strengthening the philosophical principles of religious experience and answering the critiques of opposers.[1]

## The Quran and Innate Cognition of God

The Holy Quran has used the word *fiṭrat* (nature) in *Sūrah Rūm* where it has introduced religion as an innate [*fiṭrī*] affair. It seems that Islamic researchers have been inspired by this Quranic verse in usage of the term *fiṭrat*:

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1- Several recommended references for supplementary reading:

1.Peterson, Michael, et al, *Reason and Religious Belief*, Oxford University Press, chapter 2.

2.Proudfoot, Wayne, *Religious Experience*, University of California Press; Reprint edition, 1987.

3.Wainwright, William J., *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), chapter 7, pp.120-141.

> *"So set thy face to the pure religion of Allah; this is the fiṭrat (nature) upon which Allah has created the humankind. The creation of Allah is immutable. This is the eternal religion, but most people do not know."*[1]

This verse states the fact that *religion* is an innate attribute and that God has created humanity's essence based upon this attribute. Even though this verse does not explicitly speak of innate realization of God, we may consider it a confirmation of this fact because, if the intent of "religion" in this verse is the primary teachings and pillars of faith in Islam, then surely this includes belief in the existence of God. Another possibility is that the intent of "religion" is submission and humility towards God and worshiping Him. In this case, the verse indicates the innateness of worshiping God and since worship of an unknown being is not possible, innate theism necessitates innateness of the awareness of God's existence.

Another verse that can be cited as a confirmation of innate realization of God is the verse of *Mīthāq* (covenant):

> *"And when your Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam their seed and made them their own witness, asking that: "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yes, we bear witness [to this fact]"—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: "Surely we were unaware of this [fact]."*[2]

What can be briefly understood from the verse of *Mīthāq* is that in one stage of creation, God gathered all the humans who would live in the world from the Beginning until the Day of Resurrection and secured their acknowledgement of His Lordship. The purpose for requesting this confession was that unbelievers and polytheists later could not bring the excuse that they were unaware and ignorant.[3]

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[1] *Sūrah Rūm* 30:30. (The Quranic translations in this book are derived from the Arbery translation of the Holy Quran.)

[2] *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:172.

[3] The verse of *Mīthāq* has an immensely profound content and thus exegetes have interpreted it differently: Some believe it means that before creation of the natural world, God gathered all humans in another world—the world of Dharr—where He exposed His Lordship unto them. According to another interpretation, this verse speaks symbolically and states the fact that all humans, in the essences of their

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In addition, in several verses, the Holy Quran informs of the fact that the God-perceiving nature [*fiṭrat*] of humans sometimes becomes stagnant and only awakens at critical moments:

﴿فإذا رَكِبُوا فِي الفُلْكِ دعوا الله مُخلصينَ له الدّينَ فلمّا نجّاهم إلى البرِّ إذا هم يُشركون﴾

> *"And when they embark in a ship they call upon Allah with sincerity, but when they are delivered to land and are saved, then [again] they associate others with Him."* [1]

These verses also show that the Quran confirms humankind's innate knowledge of the existence of God.

In addition, among the traditions of the Immaculates, there is mention of the innate ability of humankind to perceive God. For example, in exegesis of verse 30 of *Sūrah Rūm*, Imam Bāqir ('a) has declared:

فَطَرَهُمْ عَلَى المَعْرِفَة.

> "God has established in the nature of humans understanding of Himself."[2]

### II. The Way of Experience

Sometimes through accurate observation and meditation concerning the qualities and relations between empiric phenomena one may be guided towards cognizing the existence of God and understanding of His attributes, including Absolute Knowledge, Wisdom, and Power. This method is called the way of experience because it is based upon observation of the natural world and empirical analysis of natural phenomena.[3] Because of the unique advantages of this method, the Holy Quran has special regard towards it and thus in

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beings, possess a sort of personal—not general—and inherent—not acquired—awareness of God.

[1] *Sūrah 'Ankabūt* 29:65; also see: *Sūrah Luqmān* 31:32, and *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:53-54.

[2] Kulaīnī, *Uṣūl-e Kāfī*, vol 1, p. 13.

[3] By calling this method experiential, we do not mean that it is free of all rational reasoning; rather, we mean that one of the basic rudiments of this method is observation of natural phenomena.

many verses it calls upon humans to contemplate the phenomena of the world around them as genetic [*takwīnī*] proofs and signs of God. Some Islamic researchers have developed an argument of the existence of God based upon one aspect of the natural world—the order and discipline prevailing upon natural objects—which is called the argument of design or order [*burhān-e naẓm*].[1] The argumentation of order is an obvious example of what we have termed the way of experience.

## "Evidential Understanding" in the Quran and Traditions

In many parts of the Quran, there are verses that describe various natural phenomena, regarding such phenomena as evidence and signs of the existence of God and calling upon humans to contemplate and meditate upon them. Understanding God through the genetic [*takwīnī*] signs in Creation, which is a prime example of the experiential method of cognition of God, is sometimes called evidential or extroversive understanding.[2]

A number of verses call upon humans to contemplate the genetic [*takwīnī*] signs of God. These verses consider the existing order and organization in the world and in humankind a justification and beacon that may guide the wise towards the Divine Origin of the world:

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[1] Because the "argumentation of order" has been extensively discussed in previous textbooks we will refrain from discussing this argument.

[2] It must be said that there are several opinions regarding the interpretation of *evidential understanding* [*shenākht-e Āyeh'ī*] which have been derived from the Holy Quran. Some regard it as a preliminary to forming a rational argument—similar to what was said in explanation of the argumentation of order—concerning the existence of God and His Knowledge and Wisdom. According to another interpretation, the Quranic verses that call upon humans to contemplate natural phenomena, merely remind us of our innate understanding of God and have no significance other than notification and expunging neglect. The third opinion asserts that these verses are stated as a better disputation against polytheists; those who wrongly believe that their false idols and gods have a role in various worldly affairs and do not have a correct understanding of the Divine Unity of God. (For more information see: 'Allāmih Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mīzān*, vol 18, p. 154; Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, *Education in Beliefs* [*Āmūzish-e 'Aqāyid*], vol. 2-1, p. 68; and Javādī Āmulī, *Explanation of the Arguments of God's Existence* [*Tabyīn-e Barāhīn-e Ithbāt-e Khudā*], p. 43.)

﴿إنَّ فِي خَلقِ السَّماواتِ و الأَرضِ و اختلافِ اللَّيلِ و النَّهارِ لَأياتٍ لِأولي الأَلبابِ﴾

> *"Surely in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the alternation of night and day there are [convincing] signs for people possessed of minds."*[1]

﴿وَ فِي الأرضِ آياتٌ لِلموقِنينَ وَ فِي أنفُسِكُم أفلا تُبصِرونَ﴾

> *"And upon the earth there are [persuasive] signs for those having sure faith; and in yourselves; so do you not see?"*[2]

Furthermore, large selections of Quranic verses indicate a specific phenomenon and represent it as a sign of the existence of God and His Divine Knowledge and Power. These verses are so extensive that even enumerating a small number of them necessitates much time.[3]

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1- *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:190.

2- *Sūrah Dhāriyāt* 51:20-21. Also see: *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:164; *Sūrah Jāthiyah* 45:3-6; *Sūrah Yūnus* 10:100-101; and *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* 14:10.

3- Verses that emphasize specific phenomena as signs can be categorized into several groups. Verses regarding the domain of human life are as follows:

**1. The general order in the human genesis**: *Sūrah Jāthīyah* 45:4; and *Sūrah Rūm* 30:20.

**2. The order of development of the sperm and egg in the uterus**: *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:6; *Sūrah Infiṭār* 82:6-7; *Sūrah Taghābun* 64:3; *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:64; *Sūrah Ḥashr* 59:24; and *Sūrah Nūḥ* 71:13-14.

**3. The human cognitive system**: *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:78.

**4. Linguistic and racial differences**: *Sūrah Rūm* 30:22; *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:27-28.

**5. Human livelihood**: *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:64; *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:70; *Sūrah Jāthīyah* 45:5; *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:3; *Sūrah Rūm* 30:4-5; *Sūrah Saba'* 34:24; *Sūrah Yūnus* 10:31; *Sūrah Naml* 27:64; *Sūrah Mulk* 67:21; *Sūrah Anfāl* 8:26; *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:22, 2:172; and *Sūrah Dhāriyāt* 51:58.

**6. The system of sleep**: *Sūrah Rūm* 30:23; *Sūrah Naml* 27:86; *Sūrah Furqān* 25:47; *Sūrah Naba'* 78:9; and *Sūrah Zumar* 39:42.

**7. Clothing and beautification**: *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:26; *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:14, 16:81.

**8. Residence**: *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:80.

**9. Marriage**: *Sūrah Rūm* 30:21; *Sūrah Shaūrā* 42:11; *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:11; *Sūrah Najm* 53:45; *Sūrah Qīyāmah* 75:39; *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:72; *Sūrah Laīl* 92:3; *Sūrah Naba'* 78:8; and *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:189.

In compliance with the Holy Quran, the leaders of Islam have strenuously emphasized "*evidential understanding*" of God. For example, in a comprehensive narration addressed to one of his disciples, Imam Sādīq ('a) stated:

> "O Mufaḍal! The first edification and rationale of the existence of God—the Almighty, the Glorious—is the formation, assembly of elements, and systematization of this world. Thus if you deeply and properly contemplate the workings of the world using your intellect and wisdom, you will surely see it as a home in which all of the needs of God's servants are ready and gathered. The sky has been raised like a ceiling; the earth has been spread like a carpet; the stars have been arranged like lamps; gems have been hidden inside the earth as stockpiles; and everything has been set in its proper place. And humankind is the one who has been bestowed this home and everything within it. All kinds of plants and animals have been prepared to provide their needs and further their interests. All this shows that the world has been created through precise and intelligent quantification, order, proportion, and coordination. It has but one Creator and He is the One who has formed, ordered, and coordinated its elements."[1]

### III. The Way of Intellect

In this method, the existence of God is proven through premises, principles, and purely logical techniques.[2] Philosophical arguments and proofs of the existence of God are clear examples of intellectual analyses proving the existence of God. In comparison with the previous two methods, this method has several unique characteristics that are as follows:

1. Because of their deep and intricate philosophical nature, many argumentations and logical explanations of the existence of

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1- For more information, see: *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 186; Shaīkh Ṣadūq, *At-Tawḥīd*, vol. 2, chap. 2; and 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 3, pp. 61, 82, 130, 152.

2- By naming this method intellectual, we do not mean that it is based only on the intellect; rather, we mean that logical premises and methods are implemented.

God are not very useful for people who are not acquainted with philosophical discussions.[1]

2. One of the advantages of this method is that it can be used in the scientific battle against paradoxes put forth by heretics; in debates, it can reveal the weakness and frailty of the rationales of atheists; and it can answer the challenges of rationalists who accept nothing but logical reasoning.
3. This method can be effective in strengthening religious faith because if an individual's intellect bows before a truth, his heart also acquires a stronger inclination toward this truth. Additionally, eliminating doubt and uncertainty through secure logical reasoning has a great role in preventing loss of faith.[2]

In virtue of the unique uses of the intellectual method and the innate inclination of the inquisitive minds of humanity towards profound logical and philosophical discussions, Moslem intellectuals have performed in depth studies regarding intellectual realization of God. Some of these studies have resulted in the establishment of new argumentations regarding the existence of God or refinement of previous argumentations. The most logical argument proving the existence of God is the popular *Cosmological Argument.*[3] This argument has been presented in various forms, one of which we will introduce here:

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[1] This is not contradictory to the "generality" of the intellectual method; because by generality we mean relative generality as opposed to idiosyncrasy. In other words, this method is not specific to any single person; rather, numerous people can take advantage of it.

[2] This method is especially useful for those who are deprived of inner intuition and spiritual observation of Almighty God. According to Maūlānā:

چشم اگر داری کورانه میا    ور نداری چشم، دست آور عصا

آن عصای حزم و استدلال را    چون نداری دید، می کن پیشوا

*If you have [spiritual] eyes, come not blind;*
*And if you have no eyes, lay hold to a cane.*
*The cane of wisdom and reasoning;*
*Whilst you have no sight, make your guide.*

(Book III, pp. 275, 276)

[3] There are two main forms of this argument: the modal form and the temporal form. The form described in this text is the temporal kalām cosmological argument, which is based upon the fact that the universe has a beginning in time. [trans.]

### The Kalām Cosmological Argument

The kalām cosmological argument is based upon several premises. Complete understanding of this argument is not possible without first understanding these premises. Therefore, it is appropriate that we summarily introduce these main premises before we discuss the argument.

### a) Definition of "Necessary Being" and "Contingent Being"

Understanding the kalām cosmological argument is only viable through comprehension of the definitions of "necessary being" and "contingent being" and the differences between them. In explanation of these two terms, it can be said that the relationship of an extant object with existence—possessing the quality of being—can only be one of the following:

1. The existence of the object is necessary such that disunion of the object with existence (in other words its lack of existence) cannot be conceived.[1]
2. The existence of the object is not necessary such that it can be conceived that its relationship with existence be discontinued and it becomes non-existent.[2]

The first being whose existence is necessary and cannot possibly be non-existent is called "*necessary being*". The second, which can possibly become non-existent, is called "*contingent being*".

The following analogy is useful in bringing the issue closer to mind: the relationship of a necessary being and a contingent being with existence is similar to the relationship of sugar and water with sweetness; the sweetness of sugar can never be detached therefore the term "sweet sugar" is meaningless, but water can either be sweet or not. In order for water to become sweet, sweetness must be externally added to it. In addition, the sweetness of water can be taken from it.[1]

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[1] In more simple terms, a necessary being is a being that *cannot* possibly fail to exist. In contrast, a contingent being is a being that *can* fail to exist. In other words, we can imagine its inexistence. [trans.]

[2] Notice that there is no other possible case, because the only other assumption is that the existence of the object is impossible. This assumption is exempt from our discussion because an object whose existence is impossible can never become existent, while this discussion concerns existent objects. In other words, our categorization only covers extant objects.

According to *mutakallimūn*[2] and philosophers, this necessary being is God and all other beings are contingent beings. Therefore proving the existence of a necessary being is the same as proving the existence of God. Sometimes for brevity, instead of "necessary being" and "contingent being" the shorter terms "necessary" and "contingent" are used.

### b) The Causality Principle

Another of the premises of the kalām cosmological argument is the Causality Principle. Taking the definitions of necessary being and contingent being into consideration, the description of the Causality Principle is as follows: "*All contingent beings require a cause*".

According to this definition, the Causality Principle is a logical and axiomatic clause whose conception is sufficient for conformation and acceptance. A contingent being is a being whose existence is not necessary, in other words, its relationship with existence and non-existence is identical, meaning that it can either be or not be. Therefore, in order to exist, such an object needs a "*preferrer*" (meaning a detached object that causes the preference of the existence of the first object over its non-existence). This "preferrer" is the cause of the contingent being. Using the analogy of sugar and water it can be said that just as water needs an exterior object to make it sweet. In order for a contingent object to become existent, it also needs an exterior object to bring it into existence; this exterior object is its *cause*.[3]

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1- Of course, as it has been discussed in technical Islamic philosophy regarding necessity, the necessity of the existence of a necessary being is an "eternal necessity", while the necessity of sweetness for sugar is an "inherent necessity". According to this, there is a discrete difference between the example of sugar and sweetness and our discussion.

2- Those who practice kalām are known as *mutakallimūn*.

3- Here by cause, we mean a being that causes the existence of another being (i.e. the effect). In philosophical discussions, this cause is called "Efficient cause".

Considering the above discussion there can be derived another characteristic for a *necessary being* and a *contingent being*: a contingent being is a being whose existence is dependant upon another being (i.e. the cause), but a necessary being has an *independent* existence.

### c) The Impossibility of an Infinite Regress or Sequence (Tasalsul)

An additional premise of the kalām cosmological argument is the principle of the "*Impossibility of an Infinite Sequence*". *Sequence* means series or a set of objects coming one after the other, but in [Islamic] philosophy, it has a more specific meaning.[1] In the current discussion, by sequence we mean a sequence of causes and effects that continue infinitely, never reaching a first cause. To state the matter more clearly, an impossible sequence is a sequence in which object "A" is caused by object "B", and object "B" is caused by object "C", and object "C" is caused by object "D", and so on, without the sequence ever ending. According to the principle of "*Impossibility of an Infinite Sequence*", the existence of an infinite temporal causal sequence is impossible.

Some consider the principle of "*Impossibility of an Infinite Sequence*" axiomatic and needless of reasoning and others apply various logical arguments to prove it. For example, as an argument to prove this principle it is said:

If we imagine an infinite chain of causes and effects that do not end with a first cause—a cause that is not the effect of another cause—then each of the links in this sequence would depend upon the previous link (which is the cause of the next link) for its existence.

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[1] According to philosophers, in order for a sequence (regress) to be impossible it must meet these three conditions.

i. There must be an *infinite* number of elements in the sequence
ii. The elements of the sequence must all exist simultaneously (*temporal*)
iii. The existence of each element must be based upon the previous element. That is, each element must be caused by the previous element (*causal*).

Therefore, a finite sequence of causes and effects (for not meeting the first condition), an infinite sequence of numbers or an infinite sequence of events taken place from Creation until now (for not meeting the second condition), and an infinite set of objects that do not have a causal relationship such as an infinite line of people (for not meeting the third condition) are not [philosophically] impossible.

Because this characteristic embraces all of these envisioned links, the whole set of links (the whole sequence) would also possess this characteristic. Therefore, the whole sequence in itself would need a separate object external to the sequence that was not caused by something else. An object that originated the links in said chain. This object is the first cause; by considering it, our imagined infinite sequence is converted into a finite sequence.[1]

In order to understand this principle in a tangible manner various examples are commonly presented. For instance, imagine a rank of soldiers who plan to attack the enemy. Each soldier will only attack on the condition that the soldier beside him attacks first. Therefore, soldier "A" will only attack when soldier "B" attacks and soldier "B" conditions his attack on the attack of soldier "C" and so on. Now, if this is not a finite sequence, which does not end with a soldier whose attack is not conditional, will any attack actually commence? Clearly, the answer to this question is negative. In causal sequences, the situation is exactly similar because the existence of each element depends of the existence of its cause whose existence is also dependant upon the existence of another cause and so forth. Undoubtedly, if this sequence is infinite, basically, it cannot come into existence. Therefore, if we consider a causal sequence of *extant objects*, it will surely be finite. Such that in the example of the soldiers, if an attack has commenced, we would surely realize that the sequence was finite.

### d) The Impossibility of a Circular Cause (*Dawr*)

A circular cause happens when an object is its own cause through one or several intermediate causes.[2] The first form, meaning when an

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[1] This argument has been presented by Fārābī. By reflecting upon its content, it is clear that with minor alterations, it can be used as an argument proving the existence of a necessary being. Among Moslem philosophers, other arguments have also been presented proving the impossibility of an infinite regress, such as the argument of "*Extremity and Centre*" (*Ṭaraf wa Wasaṭ*) and the argument of "*Conformation*" (*Taṭbīq*). Complete accounts of these argumentations can be found in most books on Islamic Philosophy.

[2] It must be said that circularity is not limited to circular causes; rather, it is conceivable in other areas such as definition or reasoning. If definition "A" is defined using definition "B" and definition "B" is defined using definition "A", we would have a "*circular definition*". Similarly, if we use statement "A" to prove

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object is its own cause, is called a *clear loop* [*daūr-e ṣarīḥ*] and the second form, meaning when an object is its own cause with several intermediate causes, is called a *hidden loop* [*daūr-e muḍmar*]. Therefore, the conjecture that "A" is the cause of "B" and that "B" is the cause of "A" is a clear loop; and the supposition that "A" caused "B", "B" caused "C", and "C" caused "A" is a *hidden loop*. The impossibility of a circular cause is obvious and self-evident in both forms; because considering the fact that every cause is antecedent to its effect[1], the causality of "A" regarding "B" necessitates the antecedence of "A" over "B", and if "B" is the cause of "A" then "B" would be antecedent over "A". Therefore, "A" would be antecedent over itself.[2] This is a contradiction, because it requires that "A" simultaneously be and not be antecedent to itself.

## The Main Argument

Now that we have elucidated these premises, we shall explain the kalām cosmological argument:

There is no doubt that at least one being exists in the whole world about which we can possibly talk or think. That is to say, the set of all existents is not a void set and we are not dealing with absolute nihility, on the contrary, this set indisputably has at least one element. This

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statement "B", while statement "B" is proved using statement "A", we would have a "*circular argument*". Obviously, a circular definition of a term or a circular argument attempting to prove a statement would not be successful in attaining the purpose of the definition or reasoning.

1- Of course it should be noted that the antecedence of a cause in respect to its effect is not "*temporal*" rather, it is "*essential*". If we assume that the impact of a rock was the cause for shattering a window, there is no time interval between impact of the rock (cause) and the window shattering (effect); even so, we can say that impact of the rock antecedes the window breaking. Meaning that until the rock impacts upon the window, the window will not break. (However, the opposite is not true; in other words, it cannot be said that until the window breaks, the rock will not impact upon it.) This example somewhat elucidates the meaning of *essential antecedence* of a cause over its effect.

2- This is because the relationship of "*antecedence*" possesses the attribute of "*transitivity*". In explanation, a relationship is transitive if "A" and "B", and "B" and "C" are related, then "A" and "C" are also similarly related. For example, if "A" is greater than "B" and "B" is greater than "C", then "A" is greater than "C". However, the relationship of "*doubleness*" is not transitive, because if "A" is double "B" and "B" is double "C", "A" is not double "C".

being is either a *necessary being* or a *contingent being* (while no other assumption is possible). In other words, this being is either inherently independent and is not dependent upon any other being for its existence (i.e. necessary being) or it is dependent upon another being for its existence (i.e. contingent being).

If the first assumption is correct, then the existence of a necessary being has been proven and as we have previously stated, this necessary being is God.

However, if the second assumption is correct and the presumed being is a contingent being, according to the causal principle it needs a cause, that is to say its existence indicates the existence of its cause. If its cause is a contingent being—which needs a separate cause—and this sequence of causes goes on unto infinity, we will have an infinite regress, while as we have previously shown an infinite causal regress is impossible. Another possibility is that the presumed contingent being, with or without intermediate causes, is the effect of a cause which itself has been caused by the presumed contingent being. This possibility is also invalid because it necessitates a circular cause and as we have indicated, a circular cause, like an infinite regress is intellectually impossible.

Therefore, the only remaining possibility is that this contingent being, with or without intermediate causes, has been brought about by a cause, which has not been precipitated by another object. The fact that this cause is not also an effect means that it is inherently independent and needless of others; this being is a necessary being. Thus, the existence of a necessary being has been proven once again.

According to what we have stated, the kalām cosmological argument can be thusly summarized: Undeniably, there is at least one being in the exterior world. If this being is a necessary being, our objective (which is the existence of God or a necessary being) has been proven. If it is a contingent being, considering its need of a cause and the impossibility of an infinite regress and a circular cause, it needs a being whose existence is not the effect of another being. This being is a necessary being (or God).

### The Quran and the Need of Contingents towards God

As far as we know, the kalām cosmology argument has not been stated in the Holy Quran in its philosophic form. Several Quranic verses speak of a sort of need and dependency within all beings for God. These verses may be considered an indication of intellectual arguments that are founded upon the dependency of the world of contingents towards a God who is not dependent upon any being. For example, it has been stated in *Sūrah Fāṭir*:

﴿يا آيّها النّاس أَنتم الفقراءُ إلى الله وَ الله هُو الغنىُّ الحميدُ﴾

> *"O people! You are the ones that have need of Allah; and Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable."*[1]

Apparently, in this verse "neediness" has a very comprehensive meaning and includes a variety of needs that all beings have towards God, the most important of which is their *existential dependency.*

Also in various verses, the Quran emphasizes the fact that all beings, including humans, have been created and it has reasoned the existence of God—as the creator of the cosmos—in a manner that can be stated in the form of a logical argument. The Quran declares in argumentation against unbelievers:

﴿اَم خُلِقوا مِنْ غَيرِ شَىْءٍ اَمْ هُمُ الخالِقُونَ﴾

> *"Have they been created from nothing or are they [their own] creators?"*[2]

This is what may be extracted from this verse: Unquestionably, all humans have been created and initiated, meaning that they did not exist at one time and then they came into existence. Here we are confronted by several possibilities:

1. Humans have come into existence without a cause.
2. Humans are their own creators and originators.

These two possibilities, in all common sense, are obviously invalid and with little thought, their irrationality becomes evident. Therefore, the only logical possibility is that they are creations of a divine entity, transcendent to themselves who is God.

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[1] *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:15.

[2] *Sūrah Ṭūr* 52:35.

## Section Two

## The Path to "Him"

In the previous section, we discussed the superiority and perfection of Islamic theology and afterwards we briefly discussed the methods of realizing God, which is the first stage in understanding Him. Now we shall examine the second stage, which involves identifying divine attributes and actions. We call this step "Understanding God" as opposed to "Realizing God".

We all know very well that each religion and ideology including Islam attributes certain characteristics to their God and ascribes certain actions to Him. As we have previously mentioned, the difference of opinion between various theists regarding the attributes and actions of God have resulted in contrasting theologies and diverse portrayals of their object of devotion. Indeed, the most significant method of understanding God is by understanding His attributes and actions. A more comprehensive and in-depth insight into these issues results in a more perfect theology. Therefore, it is morally and intellectually imperative that all believers increase the depth and caliber of their understanding of God through correct and penetrating studies of God's attributes.

All of us may have seen believers who do not have an accurate understanding of God's attributes and have sufficed themselves with superficial and fallacious knowledge. It may even be true that we too are such believers. We may have seen many people who albeit unwittingly tend toward "corporealization of God" [*jism ingārī*]. For example, they may visualize God as a great being who lives in the skies. Many of us are also affected by a kind of "anthropomorphism of God" [*insānvār ingārī*]; in other words, we regard God—at least with respect to some attributes—similar to humans, or we consider the source of divine acts as humanlike feelings and emotions!

We must also bear in mind that superficial or fallacious understanding of divine attributes and actions is not merely an intellectual problem without any effect on our daily lives; the truth is the complete opposite. Persons who believe in God and His power and sovereignty but do not correctly understand the boundlessness of His mercy and clemency may completely lose all hope in attaining paradise after committing a great sin and may regard themselves eternally damned and suffer from mental anguish throughout their lives because they believe that God will never forgive them. In addition, when faced with apparently unsolvable problems in their lives, those who incorrectly understand the power and generosity of God easily give up and instead of practicing patience, perseverance, and trust in God, become debilitated and weak.

In short, the endeavors of believers to continually correct and perfect their theology is not simply a struggle to attain a worthy set of beliefs and knowledge; rather, these efforts have phenomenal, practical and sometimes decisive effects upon one's life. This is why Islam has a special regard for theological issues and has presented comprehensive teachings about divine attributes and acts. Throughout the centuries, the detailed teachings of Islam have presented *mutakalimūn*, philosophers, mystics and other Moslem thinkers with an invaluable legacy, which, through interpretation and development, has brought order to Islamic theology. In the following discussions, we shall attempt to illuminate briefly some of the most important Islamic theological beliefs.

## Understanding the Nature of God and His Attributes

One of the basics of Islamic theology is recognition and differentiation between the nature of God and His attributes and actions. Understanding Divine Nature is not possible for any being other than God, including humanity. A short and clear proof of this claim is that the nature of God is illimitable and infinite while all other beings are limited and finite and, self-evidently, a limited being cannot understand the unlimited nature of God.[1]

*The intellect can understand the depth of His nature,*

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[1] The philosophical basis of this reasoning is that knowledge and understanding require a type of encompassment of knowledge by the scholar and because a limited being cannot encompass an unlimited essence, no limited being can gain knowledge of an unlimited essence.

> *If a whirligig can reach the depth of the sea.*[1]

This fact can also be extracted from various Quranic verses such as this:

﴿يَعلَمُ مَا بَينَ أَيدِيهِم وَ مَا خَلفَهُم وَ لايُحيطُونَ بِهِ عِلماً﴾

> *"He knows that which they have before them, and that which they have left behind, while they do not comprehend Him in knowledge."*[2]

According to a tradition, as an interpretation of this verse Imam 'Alī ('a) stated:

لايُحيطُ الخَلائقُ باللهِ عزّوجلّ عِلماً.

> "Creations cannot comprehend God in knowledge."[3]

The impossibility of understanding Divine Nature does not mean that we are deprived of any knowledge of God whatsoever; rather, humanity has been given access to a different sort of knowledge that comes through appreciation of divine attributes and actions. Therefore, humanity's desire for understanding their Lord is not out of proportion. On the contrary, comprehension of God—in the way we have explained—is not only possible but also ideal. Divine prophets have also endeavored to familiarize humans with divine attributes and reveal unto them their mistakes and obstacles in the path of understanding God.

The Holy Quran has mentioned the attributes of God in many verses. For example, regard the following verse:

> *"He is Allah besides Whom there is no god. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-salutary, the Granter of security, the Guardian over all, the Almighty, the All-dominating, the All-sublime. Allah is pure of those they associate with Him. He is*

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1- به کنه ذاتش خرد برد پی اگر رسد خس به قعر دریا

2- *Sūrah Ṭāhā* 20:110. This interpretation is based upon the assumption that the Arabic pronoun "ه" (him/it) in the compound "بِهِ" (about him) refers to God.

3- Alḥuwaīzī, *Tafsīr-e Nūr u-Thaqalaīn*, vol. 3, p. 394, Tradition 117.

> *Allah the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To Him belong the Names [and attributes] Most Beautiful [asmā' ul-ḥusnā]. All that is in the Heavens and earth glorify Him. He is the Almighty, the All-wise."*[1]

## The Methods of Understanding God

Many methods of understanding the attributes and acts of God have been placed before humankind. The following are the most important methods of understanding God:

### 1. Intellect:

Just as the human intellect is useful in proving the existence of God, so also can it be useful in understanding God's attributes. Initially, through the illuminations of their minds, humans concisely realize that God must contain all *attributes of perfection*; meaning that God possesses all qualities—in an absolute manner without any defects or faults—that in any way express the perfection of their modified noun.

Subsequently, through in-depth analysis of those attributes of God that are revealed in the course of proving His existence, one may attain comprehensive understanding of other divine attributes and their respective definitions and characteristics. For example, through intellectual reasoning regarding the existence of God, we proved His existence as a necessary being and thus by contemplating the meaning of the necessity of existence, we realize that God is not compound [*murakkab*] and is indivisible or monad [*basīṭ*]. This is because any compound requires the existence of its constituents and having need of something else to exist is incompatible with necessity of being. Thus, the intellect proves the attribute of *indivisibility* of God.

### 2. Nature:

As we shall elucidate later in the discussion of divine Unity, at least several stages of belief in monotheism are amalgamated in the nature of humanity. In other words, the human nature regards God as One and Unique and does not tolerate polytheism. As a result, humans can realize and understand several of God's attributes—such as Unity—through their nature.

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[1] *Sūrah Ḥashr* 59:23-24.

### 3. Investigation of the Natural World:

Another means of understanding God is contemplation about the state and characteristics of the world around us. For example, considering the general order of existence and the finality [*hadafmandī* / *ghāyatmandī*] of natural phenomena reveals the attributes of God's omniscience and divine wisdom.

### 4. Mystical Revelation:

Mystical revelation is also a method of understanding God. Through spiritual and mystical perfection, humans can attain such rank that they can spiritually perceive the beauty and majesty of God and observe the manifestations of His perfect attributes.

### 5. Referral to the Quran and Traditions:

Yet another method of understanding the attributes and actions of God is studying Quranic verses and the teachings of the leaders of Islam. The perpetually flowing and inspiring fountainhead that is the Quran and Traditions of the Immaculates presents us with profound and extensive teachings concerning theology—teachings that the intellect cannot possibly unravel by itself or that can be comprehend only with great difficulty.[1]

## Understanding Divine Attributes

The intellect and divine revelation both agree that God possesses all attributes of perfection; God is Omniscient, Omnipotent, Benevolent, Living, Creator, Benefactor, and, in addition to these attributes, many other qualities can be accredited to Him. On the other hand, many of God's attributes—such as knowledge, power, and life—are used in common with both God and His creations. Are the meanings of each of these attributes identical in both usages? Or, does each usage have a different meaning? For example, does the word "knowledgeable" have the same meaning in these two statements: "God is knowledgeable" and "Humans are knowledgeable"? There are three main perspectives concerning these questions:

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[1] Utilization of the Quran in order to understand the attributes of God necessitates basic acceptance of several issues including the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ), his being chosen by God, and proof of several attributes of God, including truthfulness—upon which the veracity if the Quran is based.

**The First Perspective:**
Some believe that not only is the meaning different in each of these usages, in fact humankind cannot fully understand the meaning of divine attributes. They believe that we may only accept and have faith in the existence of the attributes of God that are expressed in the Quran and Traditions but we cannot understand the full truth of these attributes. The main grounds they offer for their belief is that humans perceive the meaning of attributes such as knowledge, power, and will through perceptions of our surroundings internal to ourselves, whereas associating these perceptions with God is not proper because God is in no way similar to His creations. He is an absolute and necessary being, while all other beings are contingent, limited, and imperfect. Therefore, we have no right to generalize our own attributes to God and because we do not have access to worthier concepts—and those concepts we do possess are based upon contingent beings—we have no choice but to remain silent regarding divine attributes and content ourselves with that which is discussed in the Quran and Traditions.

**The Second Perspective:**
This group believes that there is no significant difference between the meanings of divine attributes and the attributes of created things and those attributes that are ascribed to both God and His creations have a somewhat similar meaning.

**The Third Perspective:**
Alongside the aforementioned views, there is a third perspective that is more compatible with the general ambience of the Quran and Traditions. According to this view, even though there is a difference between the definitions of God's attributes and those of His creations, this does not mean that God's attributes are unfathomable. By taking inspiration from Quranic and Traditional concepts, the advocates of this perspective endeavor to offer an analysis of divine attributes that preserves the purity and sublimity of God in respect to the faults and limits of His creations while confirming the comprehensibility of His attributes. Following is a concise example of such an analysis:

First, we must contemplate the essence of an attribute of perfection when used in respect to ourselves and the beings around us, and identify all the conditions that in some way limit this attribute. Next, we must distill the attribute of these limiting conditions. In other words, we must prune and isolate the essential meaning of the attribute from all limiting factors. Thus we reach a concept that is worthy of God since it describes a sort of existential perfection and is abstracted from all faults and deficiencies.

For instance, through our internal perception and contemplation of external objects, we arrive at an understanding of "knowledge" which is a type of awareness. However, this awareness is limited by several factors: it is temporal because at first it does not exist and later comes into existence. It is also affected by deterioration and forgetfulness. Additionally, in order to gain knowledge—in many cases—tools and instruments are needed. Also, in gaining knowledge there is a possibility of error. These factors—temporality, possibility of deterioration and errors, and necessity of instruments—are such that they cause limits or faults in our knowledge and awareness. Therefore, when using this attribute regarding God, we must abstract it of all these factors while preserving its essential meaning—awareness. Thus we arrive at a description of a knowledge that is past and future eternal (non-temporal), infallible, and needless of instruments. Such a description makes the Knowledge of God understandable and at the same time compatible with the Holiness and Sublimity of God.

### Purity and Understandability of Divine Attributes in the Quran

As we have previously mentioned, this third perspective is more compatible with the Quran and Traditions. The Quran has mentioned God's attributes in hundreds of verses and in some cases it has described and analyzed these attributes. The Quran continually invites us to contemplate upon its verses.[1] How can one contemplate a verse containing God's attributes without understanding those attributes? Can one truly accept that our duty is merely to read Quranic verses without understanding? Hence, continual reference to the attributes of God in the Quran proves the fallaciousness of the first perspective. Additionally, the Quran regards "worship" and "servitude" toward God as the ultimate purpose of our creation:

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[1] For examples see: *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:82; *Sūrah Muḥammad* 47:24; and *Sūrah Ṣād* 38:29.

﴿وَ ما خلقتُ الجنّ و الإنس إلا لِيَعبدون﴾

> *"And I have not created the jinn and humankind but that they worship Me."*[1]

It also obvious that worship of a being whose essence and attributes are completely unknown is meaningless and futile. From a logical standpoint, neither communicative relations nor spiritual proximity is possible with an unintelligible being. As an example, if we do not believe in the unlimited power, authority and ability of a being to act how can we beseech help from and have faith in that being?

Additionally, many verses in the Quran emphasize the sublimity and purity of God high above the attributes of His creations. God does not tolerate the assimilative descriptions some humans associate with Him. For example, after mentioning the unworthy beliefs of polytheists about God, the Quran regards their descriptions as unfitting of the status of Divine Holiness:

﴿و جعلوا لله شُركاءَ الجنَّ و خَلَقَهم و خَرَقوا له بَنينَ و بناتٍ بغَير علمٍ، سبحانه و تعالى عمّا يصفون﴾

> *"And they ascribe the jinn as associates to Allah, though He has created them. And without any knowledge, they impute to Him sons and daughters. He is pure of and highly exalted above what they describe."*[2]

The purity the Quran describes, which both disagrees with the incomprehensibility of divine attributes and comparison of God with His creations, has been affirmed in several Traditions. Imam 'Alī ('a) has stated:

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[1] *Sūrah Dhārīyāt* 51:56.
[2] *Sūrah An'ām* 6:100.

لَم يُطلِع العقُولَ عَلى تَحديدِ صِفَتِهِ وَ لَم يَحجبها عَن واجبِ مَعرِفَتِهِ.

> "He has not informed the intellect of the limits of His attributes; however He has not made it blind to necessary knowledge of Himself."[1]

Thus, it can be said that improving one's understanding of God can only come about through understanding His attributes. Therefore, we shall endeavor to elucidate concisely several of the most important divine attributes. According to Islamic belief, one of the most important divine attributes is Divine Unity. Because of the importance of Divine Unity [*tawḥīd*], we will start our succinct discussion regarding divine attributes with Unity.

**1. Unity**

Islam is a monotheist religion. The importance of Unity is such that, along with acceptance of the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ), it is the first condition for entering the life-giving religion of Islam and eternal salvation and bliss. Knowing that God is Unique and worshiping none but Him not only has a fundamental part in Islamic beliefs, it also has a key role in other areas of Islamic teachings, such as ethics [*akhlāq*] and Islamic jurisprudence [*fiqh*]. The essence of the Islamic moral system is based upon Divine Unity and many Islamic laws and rites originate from the monotheistic essence of Islam. Belief in Divine Unity reshapes the lives of humans—in both intellectual and ideological areas, and in deed and action—and colors our whole existence.

In short, Divine Unity is the root of the tree of Islam, and ideological, moral, and applied teachings are its branches, leaves, and fruit.

The doctrine of Divine Unity is not limited to Islam. In fact, all divine prophets enjoined humans to monotheism and all divine religions were monotheistic:

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[1] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 49.

﴿و ما أرسلنا مِن قبلك مِن رَسولٍ إلّا نُوحي إليهِ أنّهُ لا إلهَ إلّا أنا فاعبُدُون﴾

> *"And before thee, we have never sent a messenger but that we revealed unto him, saying: 'There is no Allah but I, so serve Me.'"*[1]

In perpetuation of the call of previous prophets, the Holy Quran pays special attention to the principle of Divine Unity. The maxim of monotheism has been repeated many times in different forms throughout the Quran, including statements such as, "There is no god but Allah[2]", "There is no god but He[3]", and "There is no god but I[4]". Also by divine decree, the messenger of Islam (ṣ) declares that the epitome of his message (*risālah*) is enjoining people to monotheism:

﴿قُل إنّما أُمِرتُ أَن أَعبدَ الله و لا أُشرِك به، إليهِ أَدعُوا و إليهِ مَأَب﴾

> *"Say: 'I have been commanded to serve Allah and to associate naught with Him. To Him I invite [you], and to Him I return.'"*[5]

### Theoretical and Applied Monotheism

Monotheism is divided into two major branches: theoretical and applied. Theoretical monotheism is unconditional belief in the Unity of God in essence, attributes, and acts. When this belief becomes fused into the heart and soul, a person's actions and endeavors gain a certain tenor and their deeds become *monotheistic*. Thus, applied monotheism is the condition where a person's monotheistic beliefs control his actions so that he acts in accordance with his monotheistic thought.[6]

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1- *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:25.

2- "لا إله إلّا الله" (*Sūrah Ṣāfāt* 37:35; and *Sūrah Muḥammad* 47:19)

3- "لا إله إلّا هو" (*Sūrah Baqarah* 2:163 and 2:255; and *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:2, 3:6, 3:18)

4- "لا إله إلّا انا" (*Sūrah Naḥl* 16:2; and *Sūrah Anbīyā'* 21:25)

5- *Sūrah Ra'd* 13:36.

6- It must be said that by deeds and actions we intend a more general meaning than external actions. This meaning also includes internal states and behaviors such as love and faith.

Theoretical monotheism is categorized into three groups: unity of divine essence [*tawḥīd-e ẓātī*], unity of divine attributes [*tawḥīd-e ṣifātī*], and unity of divine acts [*tawḥīd-e af'ālī*]. Applied monotheism is also divided into several groups.[1]

## 2. Divine Knowledge

According to Islamic doctrine, God is knowledgeable of all creation and is aware of everything. As we have stated earlier, "knowledge" has a specific meaning which each of us experiences within ourselves. Nonetheless, in order to ascribe this definition to God we must strip it of all of the philosophical limits and conditions that are unbefitting of the divine status of God. Thus, we may define the knowledge of God as such: Divine knowledge is absolute, limitless, past and future eternal, infallible; it needs no instruments, preparation, or intermediates; and does not require external influence on the Divine Essence.

The most important fact regarding God's knowledge is the issue of the boundlessness of His awareness. God is absolutely knowledgeable of His Essence and is aware of all of His creations, both before and after their creation.

### God's Prior Knowledge and Humanity's Free Will

The knowledge of God is boundless and infinite and includes all incidents throughout the past, present and future. Thus, from the beginning of time, God has been aware of everything throughout eternity. This includes knowledge of what people will do and refrain from doing in the future. From long ago, God's awareness of the future of all people has been regarded by some as a negation of our free will. They have the misunderstanding that God's prior knowledge of our future deeds is incompatible with free will. This dispute and its resolution will be explored in the discussion entitled *Compulsion* [*jabr*] *or Free Will* [*ikhtīyār*].

### The Perspective of Quran and Traditions regarding Divine Knowledge

Many Quranic verses speak of the knowledge and awareness of God. The conjugates of the infinitive *'ilm* (knowledge), such as *'alima* (he knew) and *ya'lamu* (he knows), and the qualifier *'alīm* (very knowledgeable/omniscient) and its various offshoots such as *samī'* (able to hear/all-hearing) and *baṣīr* (able to see/all-seeing) are used many times to describe God. Additionally, in several verses there are more specific qualities of knowledge attributed to God such as *'ālim ul-ghaīb* (Knower of the Invisible) and *'allām ul-ghuyūb* (Knower of All Things Hidden). Because of the vast number of these verses, we will suffice with the explanation of two key points:

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[1] In favor of brevity, we shall refrain from further elucidation in this book.

**Proof of the Knowledge of God:**

It seems that the Holy Quran considers God's knowledge and awareness needless of proof. Even so, the following interpretation in various verses indicates a sort of rationale regarding God's omniscience:

﴿ألا يعلم مَن خَلَقَ و هو اللّطيفُ الخبيرُ﴾

> *"Does not He who created know, while He is the All-exact (Knower of subtleties), the All-aware?"*[1]

By rhetorical questioning[2], this verse asks if it is possible that God, who is the Creator, not be knowledgeable while the act of creation necessitates knowledge of all conditions and qualities of the creature. Thus according to the Holy Quran, there is a correlation between the act of creation and knowledge of the creature. Accordingly, one who considers God the Creator of all beings cannot refute His infinite knowledge of all the intricacies of Creation.

**The Absolute and Infinite Knowledge of God**

While describing God as knowledgeable and aware, the Holy Quran emphasizes the boundlessness of His knowledge. A reason for this emphasis may be that in addition to revealing a fundamental fact regarding divine attributes and perfecting and augmenting our theology and understanding of God, the principle of God's infinite knowledge has valuable ethical and spiritual effects. Faith in the infinite knowledge of God and His awareness of all things has a

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1- *Sūrah Mulk* 67:14.

2- Rhetorical questioning is a sort of questioning in which the speaker propounds a question in such a way that its answer is in the negative.

profound role in fortifying our trust in God and stimulates us to engage in sincere worship of God. Furthermore, belief in the fact that God is aware of the public and private deeds of all people, including their motives and intents, has a positive effect upon our abstinence from sin and wrongdoing. In various places, the Quran explicitly declares the boundlessness of Divine Knowledge:

﴿و الله بكلّ شیء علیم﴾

> *"And Allah is knowledgeable of all things."*[1]

Moreover, in other instances, it elucidates various aspects of divine knowledge and thus puts emphasizes on its comprehensiveness:

> *"He knows what penetrates into the earth, and what comes forth from it, and what descends from the heavens and what ascends into it. He is with you no matter where you are; and Allah sees all you do."*[2]

The descriptions in this verse pertain to many things, and in sum, this verse depicts the various aspects of God's awareness of His creation. These descriptions include seeds, raindrops, tree roots, mines and treasures hidden within the earth, subterranean animals, seething springs, ascending and descending angels, clouds, birds, comets, and inestimable other things.

Yet other verses speak of God's knowledge of the secrets hidden within the hearts:

﴿قل إِن تُخفوا ما فی صُدورِکم أو تُبدوه یَعلَمهُ اللهُ و یَعلمُ ما فی السّماوات و ما فی الأَرض﴾

> *"Say: 'Whether you hide what is in your breasts or reveal it, Allah knows it and He also knows all that is in the heavens and the earth.'"*[3]

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[1] 1- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:282.

[2] 2- *Sūrah Ḥadīd* 57:4.

[3] 3- *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:29.

The extensiveness and infiniteness of Divine Knowledge is also reflected in the teachings of Traditions (Hadith).

The Leader of the Faithful, ‘Alī (‘a), explains the broadness of Divine Knowledge as follows:

يَعلَم عَجيجَ الوُحُوشِ فى الفَلَواتِ و مَعاصِى العِبادِ فى الخَلَواتِ و اختِلافَ النّينانِ فى البِحار الغامِراتِ و تَلاطُمَ الماءِ بالرّياحِ العاصِفاتِ.

> “God is aware of the cries of wild animals in the mountains and deserts, and the private transgressions of His servants, and the movements of fish in deep seas, and also the formation of turbulence and waves by strong winds.”[1]

Additionally, it has been quoted about Imam Ṣādiq (‘a) that in response to one of his disciples who said, “I thank God to the extent of His knowledge[2]”, he replied, “Do not say that because there is no extent to His knowledge.”[3]

### 3. Divine Power

Another of God’s attributes is *power* (omnipotence). Power is also one of the attributes that humans possess in a limited and deficient manner. Consequently, the meaning of power and impotence are, to a large extent, clear to us. Even so, we must bear in mind that at times the word power is used in religious teachings with a different meaning intended. For instance, in physics and the natural sciences, power may be used synonymously with energy or force. For better understanding of the difference of meanings and avoiding confusion, it can be said that in this discussion, ‘powerful beings’ are beings that can perform an act if they will to do so and can refrain from performing it if they do not will to do so.

In other words, we can only say that one has the power to perform a certain act if performing the act or refraining from performing it depends on his own explicit volition and will. Therefore, the meaning of the statement "Jane has the power to write" is that if Jane wants to write, she may and if she does not want to, she may refrain from writing. Accordingly, omnipotence means that if God wills an act, He can carry it out, and if He wills not, He can refrain from performing the act.

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[1] 1- *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 198.

[2] 2- “الحمدلله مُنتهى عِلمِهِ” This statement presupposes that there is an extent or boundry for God’s Knowledge whereas in fact there is no limit to His Knowledge [editor].

[3] 3- “لا تَقُل ذلِكَ فإنّه لَيسَ لِعلمِهِ مُنتَهى” (Shaīkh Ṣadūq, *At-Tawḥīd*, chap. 10, Tradition 1).

Naturally, as previously mentioned, here too we must contemplate what we regard as "power" in the creatures of God, identify all limiting factors, and proclaim omnipotence to be pure of these limits. For example, when we scrutinize the truth of our power, we find that performing or foregoing an action is usually a function of external influences. Obviously, this is not true with reference to God because it necessitates that God be influenced by others and be controlled by something other than Himself, while this is contrary to the necessity of being and self-sufficiency of God.

## Illimitability of God's Power and the Omnipotence Paradox

Is God's power unlimited, absolute, and all-encompassing? Alternatively, is His power finite with some things being outside His power? According to the majority of Islamic scholars, omnipotence, like all other divine attributes of perfection, is unlimited, boundless, and without restrictions. A range of Quranic verses also attest to this fact.

Throughout time, belief in the Absolute Power of God has met with various doubts and challenges. Here we shall explain and answer one of the most important challenges which is sometimes called the "*omnipotence paradox*".

The omnipotence paradox has diverse forms, all of which are based upon a single foundation. The most complex form of this paradox is delineation of a question in which at first glance, both negative and positive answers result in direct repudiation of omnipotence. For instance, it may be asked: Is God able to create a stone that He *cannot* lift? Or, one may enquire: Can God create a being that He is *not able* to annihilate? Upon contemplation of these questions, it seems that both a positive and a negative answer will result in refutation of the absoluteness of God's power. We see that a positive answer to the first question signifies the possibility of the existence of a stone that God cannot lift and a negative answer to the same question would mean that God is powerless to create a specific stone!

Before presenting a solution to the omnipotence paradox, we must first explain types of "*impossibilities*" which are divided into three groups:

a) **Essential Impossibility:** That which is impossible per se with no other factor being involved. A contradiction is one of the most obvious forms of essential impossibility.

b) **Accidental Impossibility:** That which is not impossible per se, but whose occurrence necessitates realization of an essential impossibility. For example, the existence of an effect without a cause is an accidental impossibility because its realization necessitates a contradiction.[1] Essential and accidental impossibilities are also called logical impossibilities.

c) **Normal Impossibility:** That the occurrence of which seems impossible with respect to known natural laws, but whose realization is neither essentially impossible nor necessitates an essential impossibility. Transformation of a wooden staff into a snake, curing the sick without medicine, and speech of inanimate beings are several examples of normal impossibilities.[2]

Bearing in mind the above explanations, God's power does not encompass essential and accidental impossibilities, and all questions that are asked within the omnipotence paradox regarding the power of God in performing various acts are accidental impossibilities. For example, if we thoroughly contemplate the true nature of creation—which is called causality in philosophy—we realize that the Creator—i.e. the existence-giving cause—transcends all aspects of the creature—i.e. the effect. More specifically, the existence and all qualities and characteristics of creatures are dependant upon their Creator. Thus, supposing a creature whose creator cannot alter or destroy, necessitates supposing a situation in which the "creator" simultaneously be and not be the creator which is clearly a contradiction. Accordingly, creation of a stone that the creator cannot lift or creation of a being that the creator cannot destroy is an accidental impossibility and as we have already stated, Divine Power does not encompass accidental impossibilities.

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[1] Contradiction is the contemporaneous existence and nonexistence of an object—with the preservation of conditions that are set in logic and philosophy. According to many thinkers, the impossibility of a contradiction is the most axiomatic intellectual principle, whose refutation would cause the collapse of all human knowledge.

[2] The miracles of divine prophets are considered normal impossibilities. Through contemplation of the nature of these events, it can be realized that these occurrences oppose the normal workings of nature and the causal system of the world, but they are realized through unknown specific supernatural causes. Thus, it may be stated that normal impossibilities are not truly impossible; rather, our lack of knowledge regarding their specific causes, result in them being considered as a division of impossibilities.

It could be stated thus that the result of the above analysis is nothing but the acceptance of the finitude of God's power, but it is essential to keep in mind that the exclusion of essential and accidental impossibilities from the realm of God's power is in no way a limiting factor for divine power because essentially these things are not capable of being originated and therefore are beyond the encompassment of any type of power. Consequently, it is stated that, in essence, the definition of *shay'* (thing) does not include logical impossibilities, and thus Quranic phrases such as "God is capable of all things" are not subject to these impossibilities.[1] In other words, the deficiency and limitation pertains to the "acceptant" not the "subject".[2]

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[1] ﴿إنّ اللهَ على كُلّ شيءٍ قديرٌ﴾

[2] According to philosophers, the ability of the subject—i.e. God—in performing the act is absolute, whereas the acceptant—i.e. logical impossibility—is not capable of undergoing the act.

هر چه هست از قامت ناساز بی‌اندام ما است ورنه تشریف تو بر بالای کس کوتاه نیست

*All problems arise from our lack of understanding;*
*You are All-powerful and All-encompassing.*

For further elucidation, contemplate this example: Consider a master of potter who can fashion the most beautiful of pots from clay. Instead of clay, some water is given to him and he is asked to make a pot. It is self-evident that the potter will not be successful in the least in making a pot. Clearly, this cannot be attributed to his inability or inexperience and his status as master cannot be doubted because, essentially, what he has been provided with does not have the capability of being altered into a pot. Naturally, we admit that this example and similar examples are inherently different from the issue of our discussion—the power and ability of God. Nonetheless, because of its similarity, it can be considered as an analogy in order to understand better the subject under discussion.

As a summary of our answer to the "omnipotence paradox", we could state that these paradoxes are logical impossibilities and thus cannot be associated with power. However, this non-association is not a fundamental flaw of divine power; on the contrary, the limitation is embedded in the nature of these things.

It is significant to note that in Islamic Traditions, the answers to various forms of the omnipotence paradox are indicative of the same answer that we have proposed. According to a Hadith, in reply to someone who asked:

> هَل يَقدرُ رَبّكَ أَن يُدخِلَ الدُّنيا في بَيضةٍ مِن غَيرِ أن تَصغُرَ الدّنيا و تكبرَ البيضَة؟
>
> "Can your Lord place the world into an egg without shrinking the world or enlarging the egg?"
>
> Imam 'Alī ('a) replied:
>
> إِنّ اللهَ تبارك و تَعالى لايُنسبُ إِلى العجزِ و الّذي سَأَلتني لايَكُونُ.
>
> "Verily, God, the Blessed, the Sublime, cannot be attributed with weakness; rather, what you have asked me cannot come to pass."[1]

According to the answer of Imam 'Alī ('a), the objective of the question itself is an *impossibility*. However, he explains that this does not entail weakness and impotence in God; rather, it rises from the fact that the goal in question is logically impossible and thus, in essence, not capable of coming into being.

### Divine Power in the Quran and Traditions

The Holy Quran emphasizes the power of God through repetition of qualities such as qādir (able) and qadīr (all-powerful), and thus it regards God as omnipotent. In addition, the phrase "God is capable of all things"[2] and similar phrases have been used many times over in the Quran—all of which inform of the generality and illimitability of divine power.

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[1] Shaīkh Ṣadūq, *Al-Tawḥīd*, chap. 9, Tradition 6.

[2] ﴿إِنّ اللهَ على كُلّ شيء قَدير﴾ (For examples see: *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:109, 2:148, 2:259, etc.)

In various Quranic verses, we encounter a type of reasoning regarding the boundlessness of God's power. As an example, the Quran regards the creation of the heavens and earth as a sign of God's ability to resurrect the dead:

> *"Have they not seen that Allah, who created the heavens and earth and has not been wearied by creating them, is able to resurrect the dead? Yes indeed, He is capable of all things."*[1]

In addition, the generality of God's power is emphasized in many Hadiths. According to one Hadith, Imam Ṣādiq ('a) declared:

> مُحيطٌ بِما خَلَقَ عِلماً وَ قُدرَةً... وَ الأشياءُ لَهُ سِواءٌ عِلماً و قُدرَةً.

> "He is All-encompassing in knowledge and power with respect to His creations... All things are equal for Him in His knowledge and power."[2]

### 4. Divine Life

God is *living*. Like knowledge and power, this attribute can also be ascribed to both God and some of His creations. Through contemplation of the uses of this attribute, we realize that a living being is a being that possesses *active volition* and *awareness*. Thus, in definition we can say: "*Life* is a type of existential perfection which manifests such that the creature possessing it engages in volitional actions, and has knowledge and awareness." According to this definition, activity and awareness are signs of life, and lack of these qualities in an object shows that object to be lifeless.

With regard to this explanation, the fact that God has life means that the Divine Essence possesses a specific perfection that affirms His knowledge and actions. Naturally, in order to uphold the holiness and sublimity of God, we must purify this attribute of all limits and restrictions perceived in the life of created things.

For instance, in natural creatures such as humans and animals, life is accompanied by growth, consumption of food, reproduction, and movement such that these things signify life in these creatures.

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[1] *Sūrah Aḥqāf* 46:33.

[2] Shaīkh Ṣadūq, *Al-Tawḥīd*, chap. 9, Tradition 15.

However, we must not regard these qualities as necessary to life and we must not assume that life is absolutely linked with these qualities; rather, these qualities are only necessary in natural beings. In fact, divine life is pure of all limiting properties, which are not befitting of the divinity of God. Divine life is inherent, past eternal (*azalī*), future eternal (*abadī*), and immutable without it being associated with the necessities of natural life such as growth, consumption of food, etc.

### Divine Life according to the Quran and Traditions

There are many Quranic verses wherein God is accredited with the quality of *life*:

﴿الله لا إله الّا هو الحي القيوم﴾

> *"He is Allah; there is no god but Him, the Living, the Everlasting."*[1]

﴿هو الحيّ لا إله الّا هو فادعوه مخلصين له الدين﴾

> *"He is the Living; there is no Allah but Him, so call upon Him purifying your religion for Him, wholeheartedly."*[2]

The phrase, "هو الحي" (He is the Living)—according to Arabic grammar[3]—indicates the exclusivity of life for God and holds that true life is unique to God. Bearing in mind the fact that inferior degrees of life exist in other beings and that essentially, the Quran introduces God as the life-giver of all beings,[4] it seems that the signification of this exclusiveness is that only divine life is inherent, and past and future eternal, while lives of all creatures are temporary and 'on loan' from God.

The inexhaustibility and eternality of divine life has been stressed in various Quranic verses:

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[1] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:255, and *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:2.

[2] *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:65.

[3] According to Arabic grammar, if the predicate of a substantive sentence is definite it demonstrates the exclusivity of the predicate for the subject.

[4] For example, see: *Sūrah Rūm* 30:19, and *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:66.

﴿و توكّل على الحيِّ الّذي لايموت﴾

*"And put thy trust in the Ever-living who dies not."*[1]

In various Hadiths, the truth of divine life and its differences with the lives of creations are enumerated. The following is a profound and precise Hadith from Imam Kāẓim ('a):

و كان اللهُ حَيّاً بِلاحَياة حادِثَةٍ و لاكَونٍ مُوصوفٍ و لاكَيفٍ محدودٍ و لا أينٍ مَوقُوفٍ و لاسكانٍ ساكِنٍ بَل حَيٌّ لِنَفسِهِ.

> "And God is living but not a life that has come into being; His life does not have an [independent] existence with which to be qualified; it does not possess limitative conditions or a location in which to remain or a place in which to abide; rather, His life is inherent."[2]

This valuable Hadith reveals that in contrast to the lives of His creations, divine life has not come into being; on the contrary, in adherence with the past eternality of the Divine Essence, His life is also past eternal. *Life* is not accidental and separate from His essence; rather, it is one with His essence. Thus, in accordance with His essence, it is illimitable and boundless.

### 5. Past and Future Eternality

God is past and future eternal.[3] Most monotheists believe that God is a past eternal being, meaning that He has always existed and, in the past, there was no time in which He has not existed. Furthermore, God is future eternal—meaning that no time will come when He does not exist.

With regard to the opinions of Moslem scholars, there are evidently two perspectives in the interpretation of past and future eternality. According to the first exposition, God exists in all times; He has existed in the past, He exists now, and He will exist in the future. This explanation necessitates that God be a temporal being, restricted to the confines of time, and subject to the passage of time. In contrast, the second interpretation states past and future eternality. Basically, this means that the essence of God *transcends* the framework of time while being *immanent* throughout time and all temporal beings.[1] According to this perspective, saying that God has always existed or will perpetually exist in the future, is a careless and negligent statement.

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[1] *Sūrah Furqān* 25:58.

[2] Shaīkh Ṣadūq, *Al-Tawḥīd*, chap. 11, Tradition 6.

[3] Of course, this attribute can also be designated as an apophatic attribute [*ṣifat-e salbī*] and thus we can declare that God is a 'non-temporal' entity.

Even though the general meaning of past and future eternality is compatible with the first interpretation, it would appear that the second interpretation presents a more precise and in-depth perspective because the absoluteness of the Divine Essence signifies that His essence is not restricted to any limits or conditions—even time. To state this differently, time—with regard to the prevailing definition—is considered a quality of mobile and material creatures while the Divine Essence is pure of materiality and motion.

Accordingly, when speaking of the past and future eternality of God, we must bear in mind that the exact and acceptable meaning is that Divine Essence transcends time and that He surpasses all temporal beings. Naturally, we do not deny the fact that as long as we are restricted to the natural and physical world and have a temporal existence similar to all other natural creatures, it is difficult to imagine an ultra-temporal entity—for whom the past, present, and future are the same.[2]

## Past and Future Eternality of God in the Quran and Traditions

The terms "*azalī*" (past eternal) and "*abadī*" (future eternal) are not mentioned in the Holy Quran; the Quran has used other terms to indicate the past and future eternality of God. For example, the Quran introduces God as the "First" [*awwal*] and "Last" [*ākhir*]:

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[1] This issue will be explained in further detail in the discourse on cosmology.

[2] For a more comprehensive analysis of this discussion, issues that are more complex must be brought up, which would exceed the brevity of the current discourse.

﴿هو الاوّل و الآخِر و الظّاهِرُ و الباطِنُ و هو بكلِّ شيءٍ عليمٌ﴾

*"He is the First and the Last, and the manifest and invisible; and He is aware of all things."*[1]

Although exegetes have interpreted the two terms "*awwal*" and "*ākhir*" dissimilarly, it appears that the meaning behind these terms equates to past and future eternality and this interpretation has been endorsed by several Traditions. In a sermon entitled "Apparitions" [*Ashbāḥ*] Imam 'Alī ('a) states:

الاوّلُ الّذي لم يكن له قبل فيكون شيء قبله و الآخِرِ الّذي ليس له بعد فيكون شيء بعده.

"[God] is the First who has no before in order that there be something before Him, and He is the Last who has no after in order for there to be something after Him."[2]

In another Hadith, Imam Ṣādiq has stated:

الاوّلُ لاعَن اوّلٍ قَبلَهُ و لا عَن بَدءٍ سَبَقَهُ و الآخِرُ لا عَن نِهايَةٍ... لَم يَزَل و لايَزُولُ بِلا بَدءٍ و لانِهايَةٍ.

"He is the First without there being anything before Him or a beginning preceding Him, and He is the Last without having an end Himself... He has always been and always will be, without having a beginning or end."[3]

These statements show that "First" and "Last" mean that with regard to God no before or after can be imagined, He has no beginning nor end, and nihility neither precedes nor follows Him.

Several Quranic verses also emphasize the eternality and indestructibility of God:

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[1] *Sūrah Ḥadīd* 57:3.

[2] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 91.

[3] Kulaīnī, *Uṣūl-e Kāfī*, Chapter of Definition of Names [*Ma'ānī ul-Asmā'*], vol. 1, Tradition 6.

﴿كلُّ شيءٍ هالكٌ إِلّا وَجهَهُ﴾

*"All things perish except His Face."*[1]

Many exegetes believe the intent of "God's Face" is the Divine Essence. Accordingly, this verse implies the perpetuity and eternality of God.

**6. Divine Wisdom**

God is wise. Wisdom [*ḥikmat*] has several meanings and identifying them is necessary in order to understand this discourse better:

**1.** One definition of wisdom is "knowing and understanding the truth of objects". With respect to the boundless knowledge of God, this definition is correct regarding God, the Exalted; however, it ultimately refers to the knowledge of God. In other words, according to this definition, wisdom is one of the branches of divine knowledge.

**2.** The second meaning of wisdom is that the acts of an agent are consistent and perfect to the extremity, and far from any faults. According to this definition also, God is wise; meaning that all His actions are realized in the most unimpeachable and perfect manner and are free of any defects or flaws.

As a concise reasoning for the wisdom of God—regarding this definition—we can declare that doubtless, there is a type of congruency and general resemblance between an agent and its action because an action is, in truth, a manifestation of the fundamental nature of the agent and a display of the perfections of its essence. Thus, the action of an agent whose essence is perfect in all aspects, must be perfect in all aspects. In definition of divine wisdom the Commander of the Faithful [*Amīr al-Mu'minīn*] ('a) has made the following statements:

قَدَّرَ ما خَلَقَ فَأَحكَمَ تَقديرَهُ.

"God measured all He created and then secured and stabilized creation."[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Qaṣaṣ* 28:88.

[2] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 91, p. 76.

مُبتدِع الخَلائِقِ بِعلمِهِ و مُنشِئهِم بِحُكمِهِ بلا اقتِداءٍ لاتَعليمٍ و لااحتذاءٍ لِمِثالِ صانعٍ حَكيمٍ.

> "Through His knowledge He originates His creations and through His wisdom He creates them; without copying or learning from someone or utilizing a sample from a wise creator."[1]

An important result of divine wisdom—according to this definition—is, deeming this world the best of all possible worlds, because the world, with all its immeasurable expanses, is an act of God and divine wisdom behooves that His actions be as perfect as possible.

3. The third definition of wisdom is eschewal of unrighteous and abhorrent actions. According to this definition, a wise being never commits indecent and evil acts. This definition is also true of God. According to Islamic belief, even though God is able to commit evil acts, His perfect and illimitable essence requires that He be solely a source of good acts. Belief in this type of divine wisdom entails believing that God is pure of committing any act the general intellect of humankind deems evil.

By contemplating this definition, it becomes evident that *justice* is a branch of this type of wisdom; because, it means that God does not commit any evil act including lying, deceit, perfidy, or injustice.

4. The fourth definition of wisdom is that an agent performs actions according to rational ends and reasonable motives, and refrains from performing useless and futile acts. Therefore, this type of wisdom is the same as *finality* in deeds, meaning that God is pure of committing useless and purposeless acts and all His deeds are supported by rational intentions.

We humans also perform many of our actions with specific aims, but we must not overlook the fact that there is a fundamental difference between the finality of our deeds and the sagacity of divine acts. Through our volitional and meaningful actions, we generally endeavor to resolve one of our needs or deficiencies and by performing an action, we reach a level of perfection. Thus, the aim of our deeds is resolving needs and attaining perfection. For instance, persons who endeavor to gain knowledge by learning from a master or reading a book are in fact attempting to resolve their need of acquiring knowledge and replace ignorance with understanding to attain an ideal perfection. However, the purpose of divine acts is not attaining perfection. This is because God *is* absolute perfection and possesses no faults for which to attempt to compensate by carrying out various actions. In fact, the purpose of divine actions is guiding creations to an ideal perfection and the usefulness of these actions is resolving the needs of creatures.

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[1] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 191, p. 208.

The definition of divine wisdom under discussion is outlined in many Quranic verses. For example, regarding the finality of the creation of humans, it states:

﴿أَفحسِبتم أَنّما خَلَقناكم عَبثاً و أَنّكُم إِلينا لاتُرجَعون﴾

> *"Did you [truly] think that We have created you in vain and that you would not be returned to Us?"*[1]

In this verse, the Quran regards the creation of humans as a divine act and states that this act is not futile; rather, it has a sagacious aim. The second part of this verse may be a subtle indication of this aim, meaning that God has created us in order that we utilize our facilities for attaining perfection and bliss and ultimately achieve the results of our actions in the next life.

In another verse, the Quran speaks of the sagacity of the creation of the heavens and earth and the creatures in between—which is probably an allusion to the creation of the universe:

﴿و ما خلقنا السّماواتِ و الأَرضَ و ما بينَهُما لاعبين﴾

> *"And we have not created the heavens and earth and all that is between for sport."*[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:115.

[2] *Sūrah Dukhān* 44:38.

Also, according to a Hadith from Imam Ṣādiq ('a), in answer to someone who asked "Why has God created His servants?" he stated:

إنَّ الله تَبارَكَ و تَعالى لَم يخلُق خَلقَهُ عَبَثاً و لَم يترُكهُم سُدىً... و ما خَلَقَهُم لِيَجلِبُ منهُم مَنفِعَةً و لا لِيَدفِعُ بِهِم مَضِرَّةً بَل خَلَقَهُم لَينفعَهم و يوصِلَهُم إلى نَعيمِ الأَبَدِ.

> "Verily, God, the Blessed, the Exalted, has not created His creatures in vain and has not forsaken them... and He has not created them for profit or to draw off harm through them; rather, He has created them to bring them profit and to adjoin them with eternal blessings."[1]

### Divine Wisdom and Evil

Up to this point, it has become clear that in Islamic thought all divine acts are sagacious and have rational purposes, and naturally these purposes pertain to His creations. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in the world around us, there are affairs which we consider *evil*; all people are to some extent entangled in calamities and misfortunes caused by natural phenomena such as floods, earthquakes, epidemics, physical pains, mental illnesses, etc. which form an extensive share of evils. However, is the existence of various evils consistent with divine wisdom and the finality of Creation? If the purpose of the creation of humanity is securing their benefits, how can the existence of evil, which is contrary to human good and the purpose of humankind's creation, be justified?

First, we must realize that the existence of calamities, misfortunes, pain, suffering, and hardships in the world is not void of rational purposes. In fact, these affairs aim to provide the true personal and general good of humanity. It is evident that presenting an in-depth exposition of the philosophy or wisdom behind the existence of evil would require a detailed discussion; however, here we shall concisely enumerate several advantages of the existence of evil in the personal and social lives of humankind.

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[1] Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 313.

### a) Fulfillment of the Potential of Humanity

Humanity's nature and the general circumstances of the natural world are such that much of our material and spiritual potential can only be realized through confrontation with hardships and struggling with problems. Just as the muscles of an athlete develop through exhausting and onerous exercise, so also some of humanity's spiritual and mental abilities emerge only in order to overcome the difficulties of life when faced with trials and tribulations. For instance, many discoveries and scientific inventions have been made in response to the fundamental needs of humankind and in order to solve individual or collective problems.

The Quran emphasizes the fact that facility and ease is latent in every hardship and affliction:

﴿فانّ مع العسر يُسراً. إنّ مع العُسر يُسراً﴾

> *"So [know that] truly with hardship there is ease. Yes, verily, with hardship comes ease."*[1]

In addition, using beautiful analogies Imam 'Alī ('a) describes the effects of hardships in developing humanity's hidden abilities:

ألا و إن الشَّجرة البريّه أصلب عوداً و الروائع الخضرة أَرقُّ جلوداً و النّباتات البدويّة اقوى وقواً و أَبطا خموداً.

> "Know that the branches of a tree that grows in the desert are tougher, [while] the membrane of pleasant grass is thinner, and the fires [made] of desert plants are more radiant and they burn longer."[2]

### b) Divine Trials

One of the general traditions (*sunnat*) of God is *ibtilā'* or *trialing*. Based on the purposes of our creation and existential characteristics, God tests us in the various contexts of our lives. Of course, it must be kept in mind that divine trials are not carried out by God with the purpose of discovering an unknown; on the contrary, the purpose of this divine act—trialing—refers to His creations—humanity, and the purpose is the development of our innate abilities and emergence of our inner treasures. Humanity, in the process of divine trials, is like an ore that is placed in a fiery furnace in order to separate its impurities and reveal its precious essence. Even so, sometimes divine trials are accomplished through ease and welfare.[1] Several Quranic verses indicate trialing humans through hardships and affliction, such as:

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[1] 1- *Sūrah Sharḥ* 94:5-6.

[2] 2- *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, letter 45, p. 318.

﴿و لَنبلونّكم بِشيءٍ مِنَ الخوفِ و الجُوعِ و نَقصٍ مِن الأَموالِ و الأَنفُسِ و الثَّمَراتِ و بَشِّر الصّابرين﴾

> *"And surely we shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and reduction of assets, lives, and produce; and give thou good tidings unto the patient."*[2]

Regarding God's purpose in testing His servants through hardships, Imam 'Alī ('a) declares:

> "As punishment of indecent behavior, God afflicts His servants with reduction of the fruits of trees, withholding rain, and closing off the cascade of blessings so that a repenter repents, and a sinner renounces his sins and a self-edifier becomes edified…"[3]

**c) Awakening**

One of the most important consequences of trials and tribulations is that they awaken humans from the slumber of negligence due to our immersion in worldly luxuries; they remind us of our important responsibilities regarding our Lord and transform our arrogance into humility and modesty. As an indication of this fact, the Holy Quran declares that the peoples of the prophets have always been confronted with difficulties so that they might renounce their disobedience and surrender to righteousness:

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1- For more information, see: *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:35.

2- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:155.

3- *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 143, p. 138.

﴿و ما أَرسلنا في قريَةٍ من نبيٍّ إِلّا أَخذنا أَهلَها بِالبَأساءِ و الضَّرّاءِ لَعَلَّهُم يَضَّرَّعون﴾

*"And We have sent no prophet to any city but that We burdened its people with hardship and affliction that haply they might weep [before Allah and be humble]."*[1]

In addition, the Quran states that the calamities and hardships afflicted upon Pharaoh's nation were admonitions to remind them of the truths they had neglected:

﴿و لقد أَخذنا آل فرعونَ بِالسِّنينَ و نَقصٍ مِن الثَّمراتِ لَعَلَّهُم يَذَّكَّرونَ﴾

*"And verily, we afflicted the people of the Pharaoh with drought and diminution of produce that haply they might be edified."*[2]

**d) Appreciation of Divine Blessings**

Another advantage of the existence of evils is that people realize the significance of divine blessings and are thankful for them because, "Only one who has been afflicted can appreciate health and ease"[3]. Imam Ṣādiq has stated:

إِنّ هذِهِ الآفاتِ و إِن كانَت تَنالُ الصّالِحُ و الطّالِحُ جَميعاً فَإِنّ الله جَعَلَ ذلِكَ صَلاحاً لِلصِّنفَينِ كليهما أَمّا الصّالِحُونَ فإِنَّ الّذي يُصيبُهُم مِن هذا يَرُدُّهُم نِعَمَ رَبِّهم عِندَهُم في سالِفِ أَيّامِهِم فَيحُدُوهُم ذلك عَلَى الشُّكرِ و الصَّبرِ.

"While both the righteous and the wicked are plagued with these blights, God has instituted them as reformation for both. The blights and calamities which befall the righteous cause them to appreciate the past blessings of their Lord and this leads them to thankfulness and patience."[4]

So far, we have indicated several advantages and positive results of evil in the lives of humans. Here we shall discuss several general

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1- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:94.

2- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:130.

3- This is a Farsi proverb: "قدر عافیت کسی داند که به مصیبتی دچار آید".

4- Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 3, p. 139.

principles whose consideration will facilitate reaching the conclusions of this discourse.

1. Doubtless, the proportion of the knowledge of humanity before their ignorance is similar to the proportion of a raindrop before an endless ocean. Not only in the external world but also in the depths of our own beings there are still many untold secrets that we have yet to discover. Bearing in mind the limits of our knowledge, we cannot claim that we are aware of all the secrets and mysteries of what we call evil. Evils may have many advantages that we do not understand and evidently, *not finding* something is not a sure sign that it does *not exist*. Accordingly, wisdom dictates that we be more careful in our judgments because it is possible that what we deem evil is in fact good. The Quran reveals this truth beautifully by saying:

﴿و عَسَى أن تَكرَهوا شيأً و هو خيرٌ لكم﴾

> *"And much it happens that you abhor something which is best for you."*[1]

*While rendering this enameled circle full of patterns,*
*No one knows what He did in the revolution of the compass.*[2]

2. The ultimate purpose of the creation of humanity is not that we occupy ourselves with indolence and leisure; rather, our main and ultimate purpose is attaining true bliss, which is not possible except through worship of God and achieving divine proximity. Therefore, one must not deem anything that is in conflict with one's welfare and ease, contrary to wisdom and the purpose of creation because our eternal bliss and salvation habitually depends on enduring hardships and harshness. Therefore, consideration of the true purpose of the creation of humanity is a fundamental factor in analyzing the relationship of evils with divine wisdom. Consideration of this purpose results in a more comprehensive and realistic picture of reality.

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[1] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:216.

[2] آنکه پر نقش زد این دایره مینایی کس ندانست که در گردش پرگار چه کرد

3. Another important point that must not be neglected is the influence of the actions of people themselves in originating various evils. Humans are volitive creatures, and according to the law of causality, some of their volitional actions resulting from incorrect choices may cause or intensify various calamities and tragedies. Consequently, sometimes people bring about evil for themselves and others; however, due to unawareness of the relationship between their own actions and the results, they use the results of their actions as an excuse to challenge divine wisdom. Alas, “A self-inflictor cannot complain”.[1]

The Quran also warns of the effects of human actions in creating unpleasant incidents:

﴿ظَهَرَ الفَسادُ فِي البرّ و البحرِ بما كَسَبَت أيدي النّاس﴾

> *“Corruption has appeared in land and sea for that which humans have done by their own hands.”*[2]

4. A final point is that it may be that not all the advantages of the existence of evils can be found in every evil. However, despite the fact that this may be due to our lack of understanding, it does not harm our claim because, even if one advantage can be found for each unpleasant phenomenon, the challenge of incompatibility of evil and divine wisdom would become void.

### 7. Divine Justice

The justness of God is one of the important pillars of Islamic theology and is also one of God’s attributes. Because of its unique prominence and importance, divine justice has a special position in Islamic belief. This importance is so great that divine justice is regarded as one of the five main tenets of Shi’ism. Justice is intricately related to the genetic [*takwīnī*] order of existence and divine legislation. The acceptance or negation of divine justice results in a fundamental difference in one’s ideology. Furthermore, belief in the justness of God is one of the bases of proving the resurrection, and recompense and retribution in the afterlife. Additionally, belief in the justice of God strengthens humanity's resolve to establish a just social system and confront manifestations of evil and oppression.

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[1] This is a Farsi proverb: “خودكرده را تدبير نيست”.

[2] *Sūrah Rūm* 30:41.

### The Definition of Justice

Justice has been defined in many ways including "observance of equality and avoidance of discrimination" or "observing the rights of others". However, sometimes justice has a more general meaning that is inclusive of these definitions: "placing people and objects in suitable positions". This definition can be extracted from the following Hadith of Imam 'Alī ('a):

العدل يَضَع الامورَ مواضعها.

"Justice sets everything in its place".[1]

The basis of this statement is that everything in the world has a proper station and justice is the observance of this proportion and the positioning of everything in its appropriate place.

Therefore, divine justice is such that God deals with all of His creations as they merit, sets them in their worthy station, and provides them as they deserve.

### General Categorization of Divine Justice

To explain the range of divine justice and facilitate understanding of this discourse, we shall divide divine justice into three main branches:

#### 1. Genetic Justice [*'adl-e takwīnī*]:

God blesses every being with favors according to its eligibility and does not waste any talents or abilities. In other words, the genetic justice of God requires that He impart upon each of His creations to the extent of their capacities and bestow perfections upon them according to their abilities and aptitude.

#### 2. Legislative Justice [*'adl-e tashrī'ī*]:

God does not neglect ordaining laws and duties that are essential to the eternal bliss of humankind. Additionally, He does not give any person an obligation beyond their abilities and tolerance. Thus, divine legislation is just in relation to both these facts.

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[1] 1- *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, wise saying 437.

**3. Compensational Justice [*'adl-e jazā'ī*]:**
God ordains the recompense of each person in proportion with his or her deeds. Thus, God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. The compensational justice of God requires that no one be penalized for a duty that was not imparted. Some divine rewards and punishments are realized in this world and the rest are realized in the afterworld.[1]

### Divine Justice in the Holy Quran

The Quran indicates divine justice through negation of cruelty and oppression; God does not oppress any person:

﴿إنَّ الله لا يظلِمُ النّاسَ شيئاً و لكنَّ النّاسَ أنفُسَهم يظلمون﴾

> *"Surely, Allah in no way wrongs people; yet humans wrong themselves."*[2]

At times, the Quran speaks of Justice in a more general manner:

﴿و ما الله يريدُ ظلماً للعالمين﴾

> *"And Allah wishes no wrong upon the inhabitants of the world."*[3]

Also, some Quranic verses speak of the legislative justice of God:

﴿و لانُكلّفُ نَفساً إلّا وُسعَها و لَدينا كِتابٌ يَنطقُ بالحقِّ، و هُم لا يُظلمون﴾

> *"And We charge not any soul, save to its capacity and with Us is a Book speaking truth; and they shall not be wronged."*[4]

And some verses testify to the compensational justice of God:

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[1] It is worthy of note that divine legislative and compensational justice do not solely pertain to humans; rather, they include all responsible beings. Even so, usually the main stress of this discussion is the justness of God regarding humanity. Additionally, according to the genetic relationship of retribution in the afterlife with humankind's deeds, it can be declared that, ultimately, the compensational justice of God is a subdivision of His genetic justice.

[2] *Sūrah Yūnus* 10:44.

[3] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:108.

[4] *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:62.

﴿و نَضَعُ الموازينَ القِسطَ لِيومِ القِيامَةِ فلا تُظلَمُ نفسٌ شيئاً﴾

*"And we shall set up the scales of justice for the Day of Judgment so that no soul will be wronged in any way."*[1]

﴿و ما كنّا مُعذّبينَ حتّى نبعثَ رسولاً﴾

*"And We shall not chastise before We send forth a messenger."*[2]

## Several Questions and Answers regarding Theodicy[3]

Various questions have been proposed regarding divine justice and reaching rational answers to these may fortify one's belief in the justness of God. Here, we shall elucidate several of the major questions and answers:

### a) Difference or Discrimination?

Is the existence of differences between beings compatible with divine justice? Why has God created some as humans and others as plants or animals? Moreover, why has He deprived plants, animals, and inanimate beings of the blessing of being human? Why are some people sighted and others blind? Why are some beautiful and others ugly? Why are some intelligent and others obtuse? Are these differences not types of discriminations or unjustness regarding some of God's creatures?

In order to arrive at a succinct answer to these questions one must study the world of creation and its characteristics. As a result of such study, it is easily realized that there are unalterable laws and perfect order governing the world that cannot be dissociated from it. To state matters differently, a world cannot exist with different general laws just as there cannot be non-sweet sugar or non-liquid water. On the other hand, we observe that incommutable laws require differences between entities. For instance, let us consider the general law of causality: according to this law, every effect is deficient when

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1- *Sūrah Anbīyā'* 21:47.

2- *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:15.

3- Theodicy is the philosophic science of vindication of divine justice in view of the existence of evil. [Trans.]

compared with its cause; in other words, cause and effect are necessarily dissimilar regarding their existential perfections and the existence of an effect that is completely similar to its cause or more perfect than its cause is not possible. Additionally, the principle of consistency and congruency between cause and effect requires that if the cause of emergence of a plant or birth of a malformed child comes to pass, the effect corresponding to the cause must surely come about (i.e. the plant or malformed child). Moreover, one must not expect for instance, that a human being emerge from a seed planted in the earth or that the cause of a malformed child result in a healthy child.

In short, the existence of various types of differences—typical, racial, individual, characteristic, etc.—between the creations of God is an inseparable condition of laws that cannot be altered or removed from the world. In addition, as we have stated about the second definition of divine wisdom, this world—with all its characteristics and laws—is the best of all possible worlds.

It is clear from the discussion that genetic [*takwīnī*] dissimilarities between creations are in no way discriminations. Discrimination occurs when two objects have an equal capacity to receive benefit, but this benefit is only bestowed upon one of the two; however, the fact that some beings do not receive various perfections is due to the laws governing existence; basically, they do not have the *capacity* to attain such perfections. To state the matter differently, God is infinitely gracious, but the capacity and abilities of His creatures are limited. This restriction is an impartible quality of the world.

Consequently, divine justice tolerates the genetic [*takwīnī*] differences of creatures because these differences do not result in evil or discrimination.

### b) Death and Nonexistence

Another question regarding divine justice involves *death*: Why must we become nonexistent and deprived of life after tasting the pleasures of life and longing for immortality? Is this situation consistent with God's justice?

In short, we can answer: Death is an inextricable requirement of life in the natural world and a being that prospers in nature cannot stay in it indefinitely. That is to say, the term "*perpetuity in nature*" is self-contradictory. In addition, death is not the end of our existence; rather, it is a transition from one world to the next. Death is the end of a part of our lives and the start of another. Therefore, there is no unjust aspect to death.

### c) Commensurability of Sins with Retribution

The previous questions concern the genetic justice [*'adl-e takwīnī*] of God; however, this question relates to His compensational justice. The basis of this question is that rationally, the commensurability between a crime and its punishment must be observed. Accordingly, it is not fair for instance that a person who has committed a driving infraction be treated in the same way as a murderer. However, God has ordained heavy punishments in the afterlife for various sins. For example, according to the Quran, the punishment of a person who intentionally kills a believer is *eternal damnation*. Here it can be asked: Are punishments in the afterlife—that are not consistent with the sins and transgressions of God's servants either temporally or qualitatively—compatible with divine justice?

The answer to this question requires contemplation of the nature of punishments in the afterlife. The truth is that afterworld retribution is fundamentally different from the *conventional* punishments in this world. The quality and quantity of conventional punishments are determined by legislations and conventions; this is why various juridical systems assign differing punishments for identical crimes. For instance, in one juridical system, the punishment of murder may be execution, while another juridical system may at most sentence a murderer to life imprisonment. However, afterworld retribution is not a conventional affair. It is the genetic [*takwīnī*] and necessary result of the deeds of criminals. More precisely, it is the manifestation of the true nature of sins—the embodiment of one's deeds. Therefore, speaking of incommensurability or unjust severity is irrelevant. Accordingly, in the same manner that the apparently simple and quick act of drinking poison has serious and long term consequences,—such as long-term illness or eternal deprivation of worldly life—in addition to their negative worldly consequences, our sins have inescapable results that will manifest in the afterlife. More accurately, the truths regarding sins are revealed in the next world, which is the place of manifestation of truths and expulsion of veils.

### d) Divine Justice and Human Suffering

Another question about divine justice is concerned with the pain and suffering of humans. Is the pain and suffering that result from calamities, hardships, illnesses, etc. congruous with God's justice?

In order to answer this question concisely, we will first divide the pain and suffering of humanity into two groups:

**1.** Some suffering and hardships rise from wicked deeds and are the inevitable result of our own mistakes. Due to the sagacious purpose of our genesis, humankind has been created with volition. People make mistakes through misuse of their free will and thus they become trapped within the consequences. It is evident that this sort of pain and suffering that is a product of our own deeds, in no way contradicts divine justice. As we have stated in the discussion on wisdom, the Quran also regards many of humanity's problems as the fruit of their own deeds.

**2.** Some of humankind's tribulations are not the results of their own deeds and are not worldly retributions for their sins, such as the suffering of innocent children or the atrocities that befall innocents on account of wars imposed by others. We Muslims believe that divine justice requires that reparations be made for these sufferings in some way—whether in this world or the next. In other words, in this world or in the afterlife, God will bestow upon those who were afflicted blessings greater than their suffering and in this way, He will more than compensate for humanity's misery and adversity. Thus, it is clear that humankind's worldly suffering does not damage the countenance of divine justice.

### Apophatic Attributes [*ṣifat-e salbī*]

Thus far, we have reviewed the cataphatic attributes [*ṣifat-e thubūtī*] of God. Now it is time to consider God's apophatic attributes. In order to keep this discussion short, we must inevitably suffice with several of the more important attributes.

### 1. Negation of Corporeality

One of the most important apophatic attributes of God is His incorporeality. The Divine Essence is pure of being material and corporeal. This is because all of corporeality possesses dimensions such as length, breadth, and height and thus they have a combination of qualitative components. Consequently, all corporeal creatures are compound, whereas in the discussion of divine unity we explained that God is monad and indivisible and that basically it is not possible for the Divine Essence to be compound. As a result, the corporeality of God is impossible.

### 2. Transcendence of Space and Direction

God cannot be situated in a specific position and is not a spatial entity occupying space or location. A more evident reason for this claim is that occupying space and being placed in a certain locality are material qualities, whereas God is immaterial. The Holy Quran indicates this apophatic attribute in this manner:

﴿و لله المشرقُ و المغربُ، فأينما تُولّوا فثمَّ وجهُ الله﴾

*"And to Allah belong the east and west; whithersoever you turn is facing Allah."*[1]

It seems that the purport of *east* and *west* in this verse are not the two popular geographical directions; instead, this phrase is an allusion to all directions and the phrase "whithersoever you turn is facing God" indicates that God is present in all places and directions. The Divine Essence is not compound and has no components; therefore, His presence in all places cannot mean that He occupies all space and directions because material and sensorial occupation of direction and space requires that He be compound. Thus, His being everywhere means that He transcends direction and space.

The purport of this verse also suggests the negation of God's materiality: Since two objects cannot occupy the same space, the presence of God throughout the material and corporeal world, which is full of a variety of objects, is true only if God is an immaterial entity.

### 3. Negation of Incarnation

God cannot be embodied in any physical form. Therefore, according to Islamic belief, all perspectives that regard God as a type of incarnation in natural beings or as various humans are invalid and untrue. A short reasoning for the verity of this apophatic attribute for God is that—bearing in mind the reasoning for divine Unity—the

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1- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:115.

incarnation of God in others requires that the Divine Essence become restricted and it necessitates His need of the assumed space. However, God has an illimitable existence, He is All-sufficient, and no need can be conceived for Him.

### 4. Negation of Unity with Others

God does not unite with other beings. A reason for this claim is that if the figurative sense of unity is intended—signifying combination of two objects or alteration of an object's form—this requires reaction, transformation, and the state of being compound whereas the Sacred Divine Essence is pure of these affairs because these conditions necessitate imperfection and need. However, if the true meaning of unity is intended—meaning synthesis of two essences to form a single essence—this is impossible not only for God but for any two beings.

### 5. Negation of Visual Perception

Visual perception of God is impossible in both this world and the next. Seeing an object with one's eyes requires that the object be situated before our eyes—while maintaining special physical conditions. Such an encounter would involve the positioning of the object in a specific location. Thus, the visibility of an object necessitates possession of locality, while God, the Divine, is pure of orientation.

Yea, sensory perception of God is impossible by optical perception; however, *spiritual perception,* meaning intuition of the beauty and majesty of God *is* possible and attainable.

> *Your countenance may only be seen by spiritual eyes;*
> *Which are not comparable to my worldly eyes.*[1]

The Quran explicitly stresses the impossibility of optical perception of God:

﴿لا تُدرکه الأَبصارُ و هو یُدرکُ الأَبصار﴾

*"Eyes realize Him not, but He realizes all eyes."*[2]

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[1] دیدن روی تو را دیدهٔ جان‌بین باید
وین کجا مرتبهٔ چشم جهان‌بین من است

[2] *Sūrah An'ām* 6:103, also see: *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:143.

# Section Three

## Anthropology

The human race is mysterious and mystifying. The various aspects of existence are more profound than can be understood. Despite constant endeavor throughout history to solve the riddle of humanity's existence, there are still incalculable unrevealed mysteries. Even now that we stand upon the heights of a multitude of anthropological studies and research, we are still faced with a number of ambiguities. It is astonishing that with the development of these studies still more unconsidered perplexities unfold.

Appreciation of the importance of anthropology does not require much explanation or emphasis. The major difference between anthropology and other fields of research is that in anthropology the problem is not understanding *it*, but understanding *me*. Thus, any results from anthropological research can be greatly effective in our interpretation of the philosophy of life, our own status in existence, and our relationship with other elements of existence. In this way, anthropological research can give our lives special meaning. From this perspective, there is an irrefutable difference between understanding humankind and understanding a type of plant or animal or faraway star. In addition, many current theories and debates regarding various branches of science are based on specific anthropological hypotheses. For example, the many theories in education are established on a particular portrayal of the human race and its abilities and potentials.

### Various Branches of Anthropology

Despite their astonishing variety, the different discussions in anthropology may be classified into the four spheres of *scientific, philosophical, theosophical, and theological anthropology*. These four branches may also differ in their principles and methods of research.[1]

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1- The main methods in scientific, philosophical, and theosophical anthropology are respectively empirical, theoretical, and intuitional. Theological anthropology is

Nonetheless, it seems that comprehensive understanding of humanity cannot come about without considering the findings of all these divisions. In this treatise, our object of debate is mostly Islamic anthropology. In view of the remarkable comprehensiveness of the Islamic principles and teachings that are related to understanding humanity, we shall endeavor to present a short representation of Islam's view of humankind by selecting a few major issues.

## The Importance of Anthropology

In addition to the general aspects of the importance of understanding human nature, anthropology is especially significant from the religious perspective. The understanding of humanity and the mysteries of its being open up new doorways to understanding God. Humans are the only creation that can be the manifestation and absolute mirror of the Supreme Truth. Thus, similar to the exterior world, our inner being is also a focus of divine signs:

﴿سَنُريهم آياتِنا في الآفاقِ و في أَنفسِهم حتّى يَتبيّن لهم أنّه الحقّ﴾

> *"We shall soon reveal unto them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that He is the Supreme Truth (that it is the truth)."*[1]

Moreover, the Quran considers neglecting oneself concomitant with neglecting God:

﴿نَسُوا اللهَ فَأَنساهُم أَنفسَهم﴾

> *"They forgot Allah so He caused them to forget themselves."*[2]

Various Hadiths also emphasize this concomitance.[3] Additionally, anthropology has an intricate relationship with other Islamic ideological—like prophethood and resurrection—, moral and

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based on referral to original texts of religion. Additionally, in general, scientific anthropology mostly endeavors to answer specific and detailed questions, while in the other approaches we are faced with questions that are more fundamental.

[1] *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* (*Ḥā Mīm*) 41:53.

[2] *Sūrah Ḥashr* 59:19.

[3] See: 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Baḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 32.

jurisprudential [*fiqhī*] teachings such that correct understanding of these teachings cannot be realized without understanding humanity.

## The Creation of the Human Race

According to Islamic belief, all humans that have ever existed, regardless of their racial, cultural, lingual, and other differences have arisen from a single and common origin. In the beginning, God created a single man and woman and the rest of humankind were born of their filiation. Thus, through consecutive generations, the number of humans slowly increased:

> *"O People! Be pious towards your Lord, who created you from a single soul (person), and from it created its mate, and scattered from them many men and women."*[1]

Accordingly, some Quranic verses call humans *the children of Adam* and in this way the Quran stresses their relationship with the first link in humanity's history.[2] Also, in several verses it is emphasized that Adam ('a), who was the first human to lay foot on earth, has been created differently than the creation of his children because, in contrast to his descendants, he has not been born through the coupling of a man and woman. Like many other truths in existence, the manner of genesis of the first human is hidden from us. We know nothing more than the fact that the original substance from which the human race was created is what the Quran terms dust (*turāb*) or clay (*ṭīn*):

﴿إذ قالَ ربّك للملائكةِ إنِي خالقٌ بشراً من طينٍ﴾

> *"When thy Lord said unto the angels: Verily, I shall create a human from clay."*[3]

According to this, we can say that the Quran denounces theories that regard humanity as an evolved product of animals or humanoid beings.[1]

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1- *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:1.

2- For examples of these Quranic verses, see: *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:26, 27; *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:70; and *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:60.

3- *Sūrah Ṣād* 38:71. For further examples, see: *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:7; and *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:12. Various Quranic verses speak of "dirt" (such as *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:59) or "water" (such as *Sūrah Furqān* 25:54) or similar terms (*Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:28, 15:33).

God's unique genesis of the first human shows an aspect of humanity's intrinsic greatness and their supremacy over all other creatures in existence.

## Aspects of Humanity's Being

According to the Islamic perspective, humankind is not a completely material and natural creature. In fact, humanity's existence consists of a material aspect—the body—and an incorporeal aspect—the spirit or soul. Regarding the inception of humans, the Holy Quran declares that after the completion of several stages in the formation of the fetus, a new stage begins that is related to their incorporeal aspect:

> *"Then of the sperm We created a blood-clot, next of the blood-clot We created tissue, and then of the tissue We created bones, afterwards We covered the bones with flesh, and then We originated within it a different existence."*[2]

Even though the qualities of this new existence are not revealed, the difference in phrasing and the use of the verb "أنشأنا" (*we originated*) instead of "خلقنا" (*we created*) is a subtle indication of the fundamental difference between the respective stage and the previous stages—

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1- On occasion, it is thought that religious teachings regarding the creation of the first human contradicts Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of evolution through natural selection. Discussing the relationship of these two viewpoints requires an independent discussion. Here we shall suffice with three points:

a. Even though the theory of evolution, which is based upon *natural selection*, reveals truths regarding the evolution of various types of plants and animals, there are no consistent scientific rationales in favor of extending this theory to include humankind. In fact, with regard to the special distinctions of humans compared to advanced types of animals—such as simians—, numerous attestations repudiate this extension and render it unscientific and illegitimate.

b. The existence of fossils and other millions-of-year-old relics from humanoids cannot confirm the application of Darwin's theory to humans. This is because the extreme probability has been proposed that humanoids have existed and become extinct before the introduction of humans—who have had an entirely different and independent genesis.

c. We cannot disregard a religious standpoint that is clearly based upon Quranic verses that speak of the unique genesis of Adam and humanity's link to him on account of a scientific theory that has many critics even within the biologists' society.

2- *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:14.

which were all concerned with humanity's material aspect. Therefore, many exegetes consider this verse to be a testimony of the creation of the human spiritual gem.

Also in several Quranic verses, the creation of the spiritual and immaterial aspect of humanity is termed *breath of spirit*:

﴿ثُمَّ سوّاه و نَفَخَ فيه من روحِهِ﴾

*"Then He shaped it and breathed in it of His spirit."*[1]

According to this verse, after God brings order to the creation of the fetus, and makes its body well proportioned and balanced, He breathes spirit[2] into its body.

The nature of humanity's spirit is a complex and controversial issue.[3] According to several Quranic verses, it seems that after death the soul continues its life independent of its corporeal body.[4] Since the endurance of the spirit after the body's extinction entails the continuity of one's existence, it is clear that between the two aspects of humanity's being, their spiritual gem has *authenticity*; this gem forms the *essence* of each human and it is usually interpreted as "*me*".

Of course, the existential independence of the spirit from the body after death does not mean that there is no true relationship between these two. In fact, as long as persons live in the natural world their body and soul are correlated and are affected by each other. Based on this correlation, religious teachings obligate us to protect the sanctity of both aspects. Thus, we must be utterly protective of our body and

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1- *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:9.

2- The compound structure "روحه" (His spirit) is not a possessive compound but a "reverence compound". In this type of compound, in order to show reverence and the lofty rank of an object, the object is attributed to one of great standing and honor. Thus, the attribution of spirit to God—like similar cases such as "بيت الله" (the House of God—the holy Kaaba) or "ثار الله" (the Blood of God—attributed to Imam Hussaīn ('a))— states the reverence and greatness of the spirit among the creations of God.

3- Many Moslem thinkers regard the spirit as incorporeal and immaterial and others believe it is a type of "*subtle body*" that is different in several qualities from the material body.

4- This includes verses that term human death *tawaffā* "توفّى" (such as *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:11; *Sūrah An'ām* 6:61; *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:70; etc.)

utilize it in the best possible manner on the path of attaining salvation and bliss.[1]

The advantages of humanity's nature, especially those that originate from the spiritual aspect, have provided them with an elite status in the expansive world of existence. Humans, in the core of their essence, are superior not only superior to animals, but also to all of God's creations.

**Humans and Animals**

The material aspect of humankind has many similarities to animals. However, our spiritual aspect has profound differences that affect our beliefs and propensities.

Humans are both superior to animals in their understanding and in the instruments and sources of their understanding. In addition, our cognitive system, regarding its qualities and applications, is far more complex than the faculties of animal cognitive systems. Animal cognition is restricted to a collection of sensory data which humans share but to which they are not restricted. In addition to the senses, humankind is also equipped with the intellect—something that animals do not enjoy.[2] Through deliberation, humans are able to understand more general concepts and laws of nature; they can discern the depth and core of a thing by studying its exterior; and can discover the relationships of apparently unassociated and scattered phenomena. Logic, philosophy, and even the disparate branches of empirical science would never have been conceived without the employment of intellect.

Moreover, humans possess various spiritual (non-material) aspirations that animals do no have. These are as follows:

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[1] Many profound matters may be discussed on the relationship of the body and soul, their qualities, the genetic antecedence of the soul over the body, and the materiality or spirituality of the ego. These discussions have been omitted for the sake of brevity.

[2] In truth, we have no direct or firsthand knowledge of the perceptions of animals. All our judgments regarding this issue are solely based on observation of various signs and effects. Based on these observations, there is no doubt that animals do not enjoy intellectual thought in the manner that humans do.

### 1. The Aspiration for Knowledge:

Humans are naturally scholarly and inquisitive and the propensity to know is fused deep within their souls. Amazingly, human curiosity is not restricted to sciences that directly concern their daily lives. In fact, discovering new truths is always fascinating to humans. Knowledge and awareness is always appealing and desirable to the human race. In short, due to their inner calling, humans flee from ignorance and tend towards knowledge and awareness.

### 2. The Aspiration for Beauty:

Another of humanity's spiritual inclinations is fondness of beauty and aesthetics. All humans prefer beauty to ugliness. Our beauty and the beauty of our living environment and the objects with which we relate are important to us. In contrast, animals only endeavor to resolve their instinctive needs. Gorgeous features, attractive scenery, beautiful homes, etc. are meaningless to them. Throughout history, aesthetical tendencies have been the source of timeless masterpieces and various spiritual disciplines.

### 3. Moral Aspiration:

One of humanity's most elevated spiritual features is their ethics. Humans organize many of their deeds within the framework of moral standards and principles. Ethics has a decisive effect upon one's motives and behavior. Good and evil, and obligation and constraint have no meaning to an animal, whereas moral good and evil, and duties and restrictions are the criterion for assessment and evaluation of a person's deeds.

According to Islamic belief, understanding good and evil, and understanding the system of morals is amalgamated in humanity's being:[1]

﴿و نَفسٍ و ما سَوّاها. فَأَلْهَمَها فجورها و تقواها﴾

*"By the soul and He who shaped it and then inspired it [with the understanding of] its lewdnesses and pieties."[1]*

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[1] Understanding good and evil and moral prerequisites and stipulations is in fact a part of humanity's unique percipience; something that does not exist in animals. Even so, we mentioned this issue because of its close rapport with the discussion at hand.

Also due to their nature, humans tend toward engaging in good and are inclined against committing evils:

﴿وَ لٰكِنَّ الله حَبَّبَ إِليكم الايمانَ و زيَّنه في قلوبكم و كَرَّه إِليكم الكفرَ و الفسوقَ و العصيان﴾

> *"But Allah has endeared to you faith and has beautified it within your hearts, and He has made repulsive to you unbelief and transgression and disobedience."*[2]

Thus, disposition toward moral virtues is another quality that has made humankind superior to animals.

**4. Aspiration to Worship:**
Propensity towards worship and veneration of a divine being is another of humanity's spiritual features. Historical investigations show that from long ago, humans have been familiar with worship and adulation. The unique feeling of this disposition is so powerful and extensive that even deniers who boast of irreligion are not free of some type of exaltation and worship. Thus, prophets were not the initiators of worship and veneration. In fact, their duty was to show the correct method of worship and present humanity's religious feeling with a worthy orientation.

### The Elect of Creation

Not only is the human race superior to animals, but in light of their various attributes and distinctions, humans possess a lofty and privileged status in contrast to the whole of creation. Here we shall enumerate several of these distinctions:

### 1. God's Vicegerent [*Khalīfah*] upon the Earth

Humans are the only beings who—because of their impressive existential capacities—hold the status of divine vicegerency. While quoting a discussion between God and the angels, the Holy Quran reminisces of the creation of humans, which was carried out in order for them to be His representative upon the earth:

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1- *Sūrah Shams* 91:7-8.
2- *Sūrah Ḥujurāt* 49:7.

﴿و إذ قال ربّك للملائكة إنّي جاعلٌ في الأرض خليفةً﴾

> *"And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Verily, I shall set a viceroy upon the earth."*[1]

Various indications within this verse show that divine vicegerency is not specific to Adam ('a) and includes all human beings.[2] Additionally, when contemplating the meaning of *khalīfah* we realize that the humans are the only beings that can become the best possible manifestation of divine attributes of perfection and a symbol of His absolute good and beauty throughout the entire Creation. This is because *khalīfahs* or vicegerents are, in all aspects, representative of the office that appointed them. Therefore, the selection of humanity for this office indicates their genetic [*takwīnī*] potential and immense capacity for reaching perfection.

### 2. The Highest Capacity for Knowledge:

The Quran states that God taught Adam a special knowledge of which the angels were ignorant. After they professed their ignorance, God ordered Adam ('a) to teach the angles some of this unique knowledge:

> *"And He taught Adam [the knowledge of] the Names, all of them, then He presented them upon the angels and said: 'Explain to Me these names, if thou speak truly.' They said: 'Glory be unto Thee! We have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the All-knowing, the All-wise.' He said: 'O Adam! Explain unto them their names.'"*[3]

We do not completely know the truth of what it means to know "the Names". Even so, it seems that knowing the Names does not merely mean understanding various words, but awareness of general truths in which all of humanity's knowledge is rooted and which is attainable by God's creations.

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1- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:30.

2- The use of a substantive sentence, "إنّي جاعلٌ...", which indicates continuity, and also the objections of the angels regarding the immorality and bloodshed of humans upon the earth show that the topic of the debate between God and the angels involved the establishment of the human species.

3 *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:31-33.

In any case, this verse indicates the awesome capacity for knowledge that humans possess. This potential makes humans worthy of the vicegerency of God on earth, and elevates them to the status of educator of angels.

### 3. Divine Trusteeship:

Humans are the only creatures who accepted the heavy burden of the divine trust:

> *"Surely We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it, but humans carried it; surely they are foolish wrongdoers."*[1]

Many exegetes consider this *trust* [*amānah*] a type of volition, duty, or perfection that is realized through the volitional choices of humans. No other creature carries the responsibility of its choices and its perfection; but humans are free in choosing between good and evil. Therefore, they hold responsibility for their own volitive actions.

In any event, humans—like their Creator—have free will and through righteous use of their volition, they can attain perfections that the rest of God's creations cannot enjoy; and this is another feature of humanity's intrinsic superiority.

### 4. The World as Humankind's Instrument

Another point that reveals the lofty status of humans in the world is that God has made the universe their instrument and has given control of other things in nature to them:

﴿أَلَم تروا أَنّ اللهَ سَخّر لكم ما في السّماوات و ما في الأَرض و أَسبَغَ عليكم نِعَمَهُ ظاهرةً و باطنةً﴾

> *"Have you not seen that Allah has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and earth, and has lavished upon you His blessings, both manifest and hidden?"*[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Aḥzāb* 33:72.

[2] *Sūrah Luqmān* 31:20.

Yea, the philosophy of the world's existence is to bring about a foundation in which humans can ascend towards worthy perfections and volitional intimacy with God. The whole world belongs to humans, so that they live for God and remember Him.

> *The clouds, winds, sun, and sky exist;*
> *that you earn some bread and eat it not in neglect.*
> *For you all are bewildered and obedient;*
> *it would not be fair that you be not dutiful.*[1]

### 5. Obeisance of the Angels:

After creating Adam ('a), God ordered the angels to bow before him:

﴿و إذ قلنا للملائكةِ اسجُدوا لآدم فسجدوا﴾

> *"And when We said unto the angels: 'Bow to Adam', so they bowed."*[2]

Because Adam ('a) is the manifestation of all of humanity's existential potentials and abilities, obeisance of the angels reveals that, due to its unlimited capacities, humankind is superior even to the angels.

### 6. Humanity's Inherent Honor:

The intrinsic abilities of humankind, some of which we indicated earlier, have caused them to be honored by God:

﴿و لقد كرّمنا بني آدم﴾

> *"And truly We honored the children of Adam."*[3]

Doubtless, by this all-embracing honor, a sort of inherent honor was intended. Because of humanity's unique abilities, this honor embraces all humans.[1] Accordingly, humankind is a lofty and elevated creature before God.

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[1] ابر و باد و مه و خورشید و فلک در کارند
تا تو نانی به کف آری و به غفلت نخوری
همه از بهر تو سرگشته و فرمانبردار
شرط انصاف نباشد که تو فرمان نبری

[2] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:34.

[3] *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:70.

**The Other Side of the Coin**

Up to this point, humanity's distinctions and merits have been discussed. However, the Holy Quran also has many critical verses regarding humanity and the enumeration of their faults and deficiencies: various Quranic verses introduce humans as foolish wrongdoers,[2] very ungrateful,[3] insubordinate and rebellious,[4] niggardly[5] and avaricious,[6] hasty and rash,[7] and the most disputatious of God's creations. How is it that on one side, the Quran elevates humans to the highest of ranks and on the other side, it dispraises them with the strongest of admonishments?

The truth is that there is no contradiction in the Quran's laudations and criticisms of humans. This is because each of these laudations and criticisms addresses a specific aspect of humanity's being. Humans are unique creatures that possess an existential comprehensiveness, because both celestial [*malakūtī*] and animalistic aspects exist within them. This richness originating from the essence and nature of humankind sets them in the highest echelon of Creation. This is because they have the capacity to attain the ultimate status of perfection by strengthening their celestial and empyrean aspects and harnessing their animalistic and ignoble facets. According to the religious perspective, because of this existential wealth, humankind is worthy of praise and are thoughtful and noble creatures. In contrast, if we only consider the base aspects of humankind and focus on their instinctive and natural necessities, we shall discover a being that deserves criticism and reproach. Persons who relinquish control to their instincts and carnality [*shahwat*] and whose intellects serve their

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1- In contrast, obtainable honor is a kind of honor that can only come about through faith and virtuous deeds. The highest ranks of this type of honor are specific to the truly pious.

2- *Sūrah Aḥzāb* 33:72.

3- *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:66.

4- *Sūrah 'Alaq* 96:6.

5- *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:100.

6- *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:18.

7- *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:11

animalistic instincts and tendencies would soon become avaricious, niggardly, ungrateful, rebellious, evildoers, etc. Sometimes, such humans advance so far on the path of animality that, according to the Quran, they become viler than beasts:

﴿اولئك كالأنعام بل هم أضلّ﴾

*"They are like beasts; nay, rather, they are further astray."*[1]

Additionally, in various narrations [*riwāyāt*] after comparing humans with angels and animals, it is declared:

فمن غلب عقلهُ على شهوتهِ فهو أَعلىٰ مِن الملائكةِ و مَن غلبَت شهوتُه على عقلِه فهو أَدنى مِن البَهائمِ.

> "So whoever's intellect prevails over their carnality is better than angels, and whoever's carnality prevails over their intellect is lower than animals."

Mawlānā versified the substance of this narration in his *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī* (Spiritual Couplets):

*Word has come that the Holy Creator;*
*Has created the creations of the world in three types.*
*One group's existence is all intellect and knowledge;*
*These are the angels who know naught but worship.*
*In their essence, there is no want or passion;*
*They are pure light and live by the love of Allah.*
*Another type is void of knowledge;*
*It is called animal and is satiated by forage.*
*It sees naught but the stable and fodder;*
*It is unaware of wickedness and of honor.*
*And the third is humankind;*
*It is half angel and half donkey.*
*Its donkey half tends towards baseness;*
*The other half tends towards greatness.*
*And which will prevail in the battle of morality;*
*Of this pair which will win the backgammon?*[1]

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1- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:179.

## Compulsion or Free Will

So far, we made it clear that God has established great potentials and abilities within humanity's being. Additionally, through use of their free will and correct choices, humans can realize their genetic [*takwīnī*] and inherent potentials and attain lofty ranks of perfection. However, do we humans truly possess this instrument of volition or is everything we do compulsory and enforced? In order to answer this question we must present a brief discussion on *compulsion and volition*, especially since various religious teachings sometimes reinforce belief in compulsion or *determinism* [*jabr ingārī*].

## An Ancient Question

The issue of *compulsion and volition* is a very timeworn issue that has continually called humans to contemplation. The fundamental question is this: Do humans have free will in some of their deeds or do they have no volition whatsoever, making their actions compulsory? Volition means that a person's behavior is based on their awareness, power, and will in such a way that they are able to abandon the said behavior. In other words, a volitional act is one which is founded upon the choice and selection of the agent and happens through one's intention and decision. Of course, the fact that an action is volitional does not mean that it is committed with desire and relish because it often happens that an action is selected while contrary to the primary tendency of the agent but due to knowledge of its advantage, such as the sick who drink bitter medicine against their initial desire.

In any case, there have always been two general perspectives regarding the answer to this question: some advocate determinism

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[1] در حدیث آمد که خلّاق مجید　　خلق عالم را سه گونه آفرید
یک گُرُه را جمله عقل و علم وجود　　آن فرشته است و نداند جز سجود
نیست اندر عنصرش حرص و هوا　　نور مطلق زنده از عشق خدا
یک گروه دیگر از دانش تهی　　همچو حیوان از علف در فربهی
او نبیند جز که اصطبل و علف　　از شقاوت غافل است و از شرف
و آن سوم هست آدمیزاد و بشر　　از فرشته نیمی و نیمی ز خر
نیم خر خود مایل سفلی بود　　نیم دیگر مایل عِلوی شود
تا کدامین غالب آید در نبرد　　زین دوگانه تا کدامین بُرد نرد

[*jabr ingārī*] and believe that humans cannot commit true volitional actions and others favor free will or libertarianism [*ikhtīyār*] and believe that humans have volition in some of their deeds.[1]

## Islamic Theology and Free Will

The issue of *compulsion and volition* can be analyzed from various aspects and approaches. Since this treatise does not have the capacity for an extensive discussion regarding this issue, we will merely investigate in short several religious teachings regarding the relationship of divine attributes with determinism.[2]

Some people assume that various fundamentals of Islamic belief are incompatible with belief in free will and therefore by accepting these beliefs one must also believe in compulsion. In short, these fundamentals consist of *(a) creational unity, (b) the past eternal knowledge of Allah, and (c) the generality of Allah's will.*

### a. Unity in Creation:

In favor of determinism, it is stated that creational unity means that the sole Creator of all things is God. Thus, because human actions are also phenomena of the world of creation, the generality of the attribute of God's creation includes human actions. Therefore, only God is the Creator of humanity's deeds. That is, humans have no role in generating their own actions. In effect, there is no place for free will within humans.

In contrast, the correct meaning of creational unity is that the only independent creator that creates without the permission of a separate entity is God. Thus, creational unity does not negate the fact that other beings may be the origin of creation and fabrication through divine will and according to the general laws that He has ordained. Additionally, as we have previously stated, the Holy Quran has attributed origination and influence to God's creations. Consequently, creational unity—according to its correct interpretation—is compatible with humanity's role in their own deeds and does not result in determinism.

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[1] The existence of various involuntary actions in humans does not validate determinism and refute belief in free will and libertarianism. In fact, finding even one volitional action in humans can prove free will.

[2] It is worthy of note that various rationales have been presented in verification of determinism. Some of these rationales are philosophical and others are based on psychological and sociological provisions. By referring to the physical characteristics of the human body, various determinists have claimed that no human action is truly volitional and free of physiological determinative factors. Thus, one may speak of the various approaches to determinism; such as the philosophic approach, the sociologic approach, etc. In this discourse, we shall discuss the Kalam approach that addresses the relationship of free will with various religious beliefs regarding the attributes of God.

**b. God's Past Eternal Knowledge:**

Presented here is an abstract of the *determinist rationale* based on the past eternal knowledge of God: God knows beforehand what people will and will not do in the future. Additionally, the nonconformity of divine knowledge with external truths necessitates the alteration of divine knowledge to ignorance. To state matters differently, if God knows that a specific person will perform a specific action at a specific time, but that person abandons that action at that time, God's knowledge would become ignorance because according to the assumption, that which was within God's knowledge did not conform to actuality. However, the absolute knowledge of God requires that He know all events and phenomena as they truly are. Thus, performing an action that God knows will happen is necessary, and carrying out any action that God knows will not occur is impossible. As a result, human deeds are either necessary or impossible. Which means that none of our deeds is volitional; because the occurrence of the actions that we perform is necessary and not accomplishing them is impossible; also, the actions that we do not perform are impossible to execute and abandoning them is necessary.

In response to this rationale, we can declare, there is no doubt that God has foreknowledge of our actions, yet that which is recorded in divine knowledge is human actions complete with all their characteristics and conditions. Some of these characteristics include space and time elements and some pertain to the agent. One of the characteristics of volitional actions is that they emerge though volition and free choices. Therefore, the fact that God has foreknowledge of our volitional actions means that God knows that a specific person, utilizing their free will—not under compulsion—shall perform a specific action in a specific time and place. To state matters differently, if God knows that an individual shall perform an action at time A and location B, then performing that action becomes necessary at time A and location B and its occurrence at time B or location C would be impossible. Similarly, if God knows that a definite action shall be performed with volition, then that action must surely occur through volition. Therefore, it is clear that the necessity for the occurrence of volitional actions—according to God's foreknowledge—is not only not contradictory to it being volitional, but it confirms it. Because God's foreknowledge means that, the compulsory and involuntary occurrence of these actions is impossible.[1]

The conundrum [*shubhah*] of divine knowledge and free will, in addition to having complex expositions such as the one we presented, has simple and more general forms that are usually expressed using terms such as *destiny* or *fate*.

It is clear from the response we gave for this conundrum that terms such as destiny or fate do not mean that humans have no volition; rather that a person's destiny is nothing more than the fact that the person shall perform their volitional actions with free will and their involuntary actions, involuntarily. In other words, destiny has two areas:

a. The domain outside volition: In this case, the duty of the believer is submission and contentment.

b. The domain of volitional actions: In this area, fate is not in conflict with our free will and choices. Thus, in this domain, humans are responsible for their actions.

### c. Generality of the Divine Will:

Another of the Islamic principles of faith, which may seem to necessitate compulsion, is the Divine Will predominance principle: according to religious teachings and various Quranic verses,[2] nothing happens outside the all-encompassing sphere of the Divine Will. As a requirement of this principle, all actions and even feelings adhere to God's will. In this case, is there any room left for free will?

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[1] In philosophical terms, the necessity for occurrence of a volitional action is of the same type of the necessity for occurrence of an effect whose sufficient cause is realized. In other words, when the sufficient cause for the occurrence of a volitional action is realized—including the external and internal conditions of the agent such as selection, choice, and will—its occurrence becomes necessary.

[2] For examples see: *Sūrah Yūnus* 10:100; and *Sūrah Takwīr* 81:29.

The answer to this claim can be extracted from our previous discussion regarding the divine knowledge and human volition incompatibility conundrum. Here, God's will does not involve the *occurrence of actions in an absolute manner and free of conditions*. In fact, His will requires that every effect be originated by an immediate cause while preserving all the conditions of the effect. Hence, in the same way that the Divine Will requires involuntary emanation of heat from fire, His will also requires that our volitional actions be accompanied by human knowledge, will, and volition. Therefore, realization of the Divine Will not only does not negate free will, it guaranties it.

These discussions reveal that if the religious teachings regarding divine attributes are correctly understood, they will not contradict the principle of free will.

Not only is the doctrine of free will able to answer all determinist conundrums, there are many verifications to its validity. These verifications are moral or intuitional in nature and are more or less available to everyone. On the whole, these proofs provide a secure foundation for free will: inner feeling and intuition of free will; indecision; legislating social laws, prohibitions, and ordinances; existence of instructive systems and penal codes and rewards; and regret for performing acts of evil are several of these proofs.[1] The

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1- In various parts of the *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī* (Spiritual Couplets), Maulānā has utilized these evidences and has regarded them as proofs of free will. Some of these verses include:

**a. Intuition of Free will:**

*Doubtless, we have free will; feeling cannot refute it.*
*Free will is hidden within us; when faced with a dilemma it is revealed.*
*Intuition shows the same as feeling does; O brother, they both are of the same tier.* (Book V)

**b. Indecision:**

*That you ask yourself tomorrow, should I do this or that; this itself is proof of free will, O Idol!*
*We are caught in indecision between two things; how can this indecision be involuntary?*
*How can 'should I do this or that' happen, if one's hands and feet are tied?*

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consequential and extensive existence of these affairs in our individual and social lives has made even hard fatalists unable to refute free will in practice.

### Quran and Free Will

There are many verses in the Holy Quran that directly or obliquely speak of humanity's free will and its role in one's deeds. For instance, the Quran has stressed the voluntariness of faith and disbelief—both of which are innate acts:

﴿و قل الحقُّ من ربّكم فَمن شاءَ فَليؤمن و مَن شاءَ فَليَكفر﴾

> *“And say: ‘The truth is from your Lord, so let whoever wills believe and whoever wills disbelieve.’”*[1]

Additionally, verses that speak of testing and trialing humanity in their worldly life indicate their free will, since testing an agent without volition is futile.

﴿و نَبلوكم بالشَّر و الخَير فتنةً و إِلينا تُرجَعون﴾

> *“And We shall try you with evil and goodness and surely, you shall return to Us.”*[1]

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(Book V)

**c. Ordering and Forbidding Others:**

*No one tells a stone to come; and who would seek loyalty from a piece of clod?*
*No one tells a stone that it has come late; or that O stick! Why have you struck me?*
*Orders, forbiddance, wrath, respect, and retribution; go with nothing but free will, O true of heart!*

(Book V)

**d. System of Reward and Punishment:**

*Teachers beat their pupils; would they ever punish a black stone?*
*Would you ever tell a stone to come; and if not, I will punish the naughty?*

(Book V)

**e. Regretting Evil Deeds:**

*Our weeping is a reason of free will; our embarrassment has become a reason for compulsion.*
*If there is no free will, what is this shame; what are pity, humiliation, and modesty?*
*If all was compulsion, who would be embarrassed; if all was injustice who would be guardian?*

(Book I)

1- *Sūrah Kahf* 18:29.

Moreover, various Quranic verses inform of our responsibility towards our actions. Needless to say, only volitive agents may be held answerable.

﴿وقِفُوهم إِنَّهم مَسئُولون﴾

"And stop them for surely they are responsible."[2]

Furthermore, all Quranic verses that pertain to recompense and retribution for the actions of humans either praise the righteous and criticize the wicked, speak of humankind's injustice towards their souls, inform of appointing prophets or the establishment of religions, or include edicts and proscriptions. All these issues validate free will in some way because if there were no free will these Quranic verses would have no acceptable or coherent meaning.

In addition to the verses we have indicated, various verses speak of the generality of the Divine Will and its precedence over the will of humankind or the generality of divine knowledge. However, as we have previously stated, if the intent of these verses are correctly understood, there will be no inconsistency with the voluntariness of some of our deeds.

## Human Perfection (Teleology)

Theological anthropology is not limited to the origin of humanity, the structure of its being, and its natural potentials. In fact, it includes a long eulogy regarding the purposes of humanity's creation, the levels of its perfection, and the methods of attaining these perfections. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that all the scientific teachings of Islam, both in the spheres of religion and ethics, have been presented in order to guide humanity toward their highest state of perfection.

The perfection of an object gains meaning through the purposes of its existence. The closer a being comes to the purposes of its creation, the more complete it is. The purpose of the creation of humans, contrary to many other creations, can only be realized through conscious

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1- *Sūrah Anbīyā'* 21:35.

2- *Sūrah Sāffāt* 37:24.

choices. This is why humanity's perfection is volitive and must be obtained. In addition, because the ultimate objective of humanity's existence has no limits, humans can attain unlimited levels of perfection. As a result, one can always speak of a more perfect person and thus the path of perfection has no journey's end.

Of course, phrases such as *walking the path of perfection* do not mean that there is a path external to humanity's being that brings them closer to the purpose of their creation; rather, here, the traveler—mystic—and path are one. In other words, humans' path of perfection is "themselves". Thus, transitive and immanent acts can only help one attain perfection if they affect one's soul and cause it to transcend its respective status. Therefore, any external or unrelated affair to the human essence, such as fame, riches, and titles cannot bring about humanity's true perfection. The Quran indicates this truth in a very subtle manner:

﴿هم درجات عند الله﴾

*"They [have] ranks before Allah."*[1]

This assertion both indicates humanity's various levels of perfection and also signifies that the source of this difference is not external to their own essence but it is they themselves that are the ranks and statuses. In other words, spiritual ranks are not like worldly conventional ranks to which one can be appointed or discharged; rather, each person *is* a rank and level of perfection.

The Quran regards the ultimate purpose or telos of humanity's creation and the terminus of their perfection the attaining of the rank of God's servant:

﴿و ما خلقتُ الجنَ و الإنسَ إلّا ليعبدون﴾

*"And I have not created the jinn and humans except that they serve Me."*[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:163.

[2] *Sūrah Dhārīyāt* 51:56.

Thus, by increasing our servility towards God we become more complete. Servility towards God begins with outward humility and performing the sacred rites of religion. It progresses in synchrony with love of God, understanding Him, and sincerity [*ikhlāṣ*] in one's actions. Gradually, humans reach a position in which all their states, from their motives and thoughts, to their speech and deeds, become divine and their carnality [*hawāye nafs*] and materialism are altogether extinguished. In this state, our truth-discerning eyes are opened and we see the degrees of divine Unity through our hearts and discover the entire world as a manifestation of the names and attributes of the Supreme Truth. It has been narrated from Amir al-Mu'minīn, 'Alī ('a) that:

ما رأيتُ شيئاً إلّا و رأيتُ الله قبلَه و معَه و بعدَه.

> "I have never seen anything but that I saw God before it, with it, and after it."[1]

As we have previously indicated, people are multidimensional beings. Therefore, their perfection requires that all of their existential aspects grow simultaneously and that all of their physical and spiritual potentials and capacities be employed in the best possible manner. In portraying the perfect human, the mundane doctrines only emphasize several specific aspects: some philosophers regard the perfection of humankind in the perfection of their intellect, and some mystics seek it in seclusion and ascesis [*riyāẓat*]. Others perceive furthering the conquest and exploitation of nature as a standard for human perfection. According to Islam, human perfection cannot be realized but through coordinated and simultaneous development of all human abilities, such that all talents are utilized on the path of servitude and intimacy with God.

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[1] 1- *'Ilm ul-Yaqīn*, vol. 1, p. 49. Also according to Sa'dī :

رسد آدمی به جایی که به جز خدا نبیند        بنگر که تا چه حد است مکان آدمیت

*Humans can reach the status that they see naught but God;*
*Behold the greatness of humanity's position.*

And Shaīkh Maḥmūd Shabastarī said in his book *Gulshan-e Rāz*:

به نزد آنکه جانش در تجلّیٰ است        همه عالم کتاب حقّ تعالیٰ است

*According to one whose whole being is infused with revelation;*
*The whole world is the book of Divine Truth (God).*

Islam's perfect human does not become attached to the world or bewitched by it. In fact, perfect humans regard the phenomena of the natural world as divine signs and blessings and consider the world a plantation for reaping for the next world. According to their perspective, their material bodies are not cages but one of the gifts of their creation that must be utilized in the best possible manner. In addition, such persons do not retreat from society. Indeed, they regard being with people and helping their fellow humans a type of servitude and worship of God, which results in closer intimacy with God. They are also distressed and troubled at the pain and suffering of others. This is why the divine prophets and saints [*awliyā' ilāhī*]—which are exalted examples of human perfection—have lived within the society and worried about the spiritual and material problems of their peoples and became heartsick at the transgressions that caused their peoples to go astray and the persecution and privation that troubled them. The Quran declares of our holy prophet (ṣ):

﴿لقد جاءكم رسولٌ من أَنفسكم عزيزٌ عليه ما عَنِتّم حريصٌ عليكم و بـــالمؤمنينَ رءوفٌ رحيمٌ﴾

> *"Surely, there has come to you a messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering, anxious he is over your [guidance], to the believers [he is] gentle and compassionate."*[1]

Another manifestation of human perfection in Islam is contemplation. In many verses, the Quran enjoins us to contemplate and think. Doubtless, here the intended faculty for contemplation is not 'instrumental' reason, which is the foundation of industry and technology. This is because history clearly shows that there is no interdependence between industrial development and the exploitation of nature and humanity's perfection in either their material or spiritual aspects. The *contemplation* that Islam regards as a precondition to perfection is the reflection upon the fundamental truths of the world that bring about a more complete state of self-knowledge and understanding of God. For example, we must contemplate the inherent nature of humankind and the world, its origin and final destination, the status of humanity in the world, and our rights and obligations. Additionally, this contemplation must result in a foundation for conscious servitude towards God that is suffused with love and understanding. It must also strip the rust of ignorance and negligence from humanity's heart and soul. According to various Hadith, such contemplation is greater than [heedless] worship, and is in fact the essence of meritorious worship:

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[1] 1- *Sūrah Tawbah* 9:128.

**تفكّر ساعة أفضلُ من عبادة سبعين سنة.**

"A moment's thought is superior to seventy years of worship."

**و العقل ما عُبِد به الرحمن.**

"And the intellect is that which is used to worship the Beneficent."[1]

*The intellect of faith is like a righteous person;*
*It is the guardian and ruler of the city of the heart.*
*That marvelous messenger said very beautifully;*
*A grain of your intellect is better than fasting and prayer.*
*This is because your intellect is essential and these two are incidental;*
*These two obligations complete that.*[2]

There are many discussions about the attributes and manifestations of human perfection in Islam and the portrayal of the countenance of a perfect human is like the drawing of an exquisite painting that cannot be created without the use of hundreds of marvelous colors and unparalleled patterns. Here are several of the most notable qualities of a perfect human in one sentence. Perfect humans are self-knowing, god-knowing, contemplative, self-analyzing, faithful, pious, righteous, monotheist in thought and practice, adorned with all virtues and divested of all ethical evils, suffused with love of God, possessed of love and compassion for all of God's creatures, vigilant and heedful of the rights of the oppressed and deprived, true servants of God, nightly worshipers and daily toilers, predominant over their carnalities [*shahawāt-e nafsānī*], and utilizers of nature for divine purposes.

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[1] *Uṣūl-e Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 11.

[2]
عقل ایمانی چو شخص عادل است
پاسبان و حاکم شهر دل است
بس نکو گفت آن رسول دلنواز
ذره‌ای عقلت به از صوم و نماز
زانکه عقلت جوهر است این دو عرض
این دو تکمیل آن شد مفترض

Of course, as we have previously stated, human perfection has unlimited stages. Therefore, the more extensive and deep-rooted a person can make these qualities within themselves, the higher the degree of perfection.

### Worship and the Complete Human

One of the subtle and precious expressions of the human soul is worshiping a divine being, confiding in Him, and confessing one's needs to Him [*rāz wa nīyāz*]. As we have stated earlier, humanity's need and propensity for worship is one of the characteristics that make them superior to animals. One of the achievements of divine religions is that they respond to this need in the best possible manner by enjoining people to worship the true Deity and preventing worship of false gods.

Confiding one's secrets and professing one's needs to his Lord is one of the most beautiful expressions of worship. This is because in this state a person perceives their Lord more intimately than a person perceives any other; they regard Him worthy of their confidence; and with faith in His power, benevolence, and grace they profess their needs to Him. Praying to God, if done with love and purity of heart, and with the help of divine attraction [*jazabah-ye ilāhī*], can promote a person to such heights that even the angels cannot attain and can bless a person with unrivaled ecstasy and bliss.

The Quran enjoins humans to call upon God at all times. Also, it regards the true enlightened [*Ulul-Albāb*] to be those who do not forget God no matter what circumstances they have in their lives:

﴿الّذين يذكرونَ الله قياماً و قُعوداً و على جنوبهم﴾

> *"Those who remember Allah while standing and sitting and lying on their sides."*[1]

Additionally, many Quranic verses enjoin people to ask for succor sincerely:

﴿هو الحيُّ لا إله إلّا هو فادعوه مخلصينَ له الدّين﴾

> *"He is the Living; there is no Allah but Him. So call upon Him, making your religion His sincerely."*[2]

Various Quranic verses advise worshiping God in private. It seems that in private, our soul is better prepared for spiritual connection with God and soaring towards the Heavens:

﴿ادعوا ربّكم تضرُّعاً و خفيةً، إنّه لا يُحبُّ المُعتدين﴾

> *"Call upon your Lord, humbly and secretly; Surely, He loves not transgressors."*[3]

In addition to enjoining humankind to worshiping the One God, Islam sets specific standards for worship. Besides various Quranic verses that are themselves supplications or prayers,[4] we have inherited a legacy of valuable prayers [*du'ā*] from the Infallibles ('a). These prayers display the most beautiful features of worship, sincerity, love, and devotion. Even so, the most important Islamic worship is *Ṣalāt* (Farsi: *Namāz*)—the Muslim daily ritual prayer.

## Ṣalāt, the Most Beautiful Aspect of Worshiping the Divine

Although the form of *Ṣalāt* is no more than a set of specific gestures and utterances, the reality of *Ṣalāt* is much more profound. In other words, like humans, *Ṣalāt* also has a dual reality. Thus, we may speak of the 'perfection of *Ṣalāt*' and the 'perfect *Ṣalāt*'. The form of *Ṣalāt* consists of precise actions and vocables, which must be preceded by specific preliminaries and special conditions. Religious jurisprudence [*fiqh*] discusses in detail the preliminaries, conditions, pillars [*arkān*], and elements of *Ṣalāt*. Observing the jurisprudential [*fiqhī*] edicts of *Ṣalāt* is the first condition to benefiting from its spiritual effects and blessings. However, transcending all these forms are hidden secrets and truths. These inner secrets have caused *Ṣalāt* to be one of the pillars of the Islamic religion[1] and have made it the 'ascension [mi'rāj] of the faithful [*mu'min*]':

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[1] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:191.

[2] *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:65.

[3] *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:55.

[4] These verses generally begin with the term "ربّنا" (*Our Lord!*) and relate the substance of the supplications of prophets, saints, and the faithful [*mu'minūn*]. For examples, see: *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:201, 2:250; and *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:8-9, 3:16.

الصلاة معراج المؤمن.

"*Ṣalāt* is the ascension of the faithful."

The more a person understands the secrets of the ritual prayer and reaches its depths, their *Ṣalāt* becomes more complete and perfect. Not only is the perfection of one's *Ṣalāt* a sign of one's perfection, it is in fact the practical manifestation of one's perfection. During *Ṣalāt*, perfect humans lose all indications of egocentricity and selfishness and they become completely captivated by the beauty of the Deity.

*While performing Ṣalāt I recalled the curve of your eyebrows;*[2]
*I attained a state in which I heard the shrine glorifying You.*[3]

The depth and comprehensiveness of the ritual prayer is such that it can be regarded from many perspectives where its different effects and blessings can be analyzed. For example, academic specialists study the educative and moral effects of *Ṣalāt*, while psychoanalysts analyze its mental effects. One may also research the role of *Ṣalāt* in the Islamic society from a social perspective. However, mystics have a different frame of mind. The Gnostics of Truth and travelers on the path of the Beloved observe *Ṣalāt* with penetrating eyes and an intuition that tears the veils of materiality, and thus expose spiritual and mystical secrets. Herein, we shall briefly explain various inner secrets of some preliminaries and elements of *Ṣalāt*.[1] May it guide us to deeper wisdom and understanding of worship.

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[1] In many Hadiths, *Salāt* is enumerated as one of the five pillars of Islam.

[2] The curve of the eyebrows is symbolic of God's characteristics.

[3] در نمازم خم ابروی تو در یاد آمد
حالتی رفت که محراب به فریاد آمد

### Secrets of *Ṣalāt*

As we have indicated, *Ṣalāt* has various aspects, which begin with the most manifest of facets (uttering various words and performing assorted gestures) and develops endlessly in accordance with the spiritual status of the worshiper. What we shall indicate herein is a drop from the boundless ocean of *Ṣalāt* and a whisper of its unlimited degrees and untold secrets.

### 1. Wuḍū[2]

The outward appearance of Wuḍū is washing and wiping [*masḥ*] various members of one's body with clean and pure [*pāk/muṭahar*] water through which our external dirtiness is purged. The essence of Wuḍū, however, is cleansing of the heart and soul of the worshiper with the water of divine manifestations [*tajalliyāt-e ilāhī*]. Just as the water that descends from the sky can clean one's body, the water of divine manifestations descends upon the hearts of worshipers and cleanses their heart and soul. By washing their face—i.e. manifest countenance—worshipers purify their hearts—i.e. spiritual countenance—of all thoughts but God. By washing their hands and arms, they wash themselves of worldliness. By wiping their head and feet, they prevent themselves from pondering the mundane world and walking the path of secularism.

### 2. Call to Prayer [Adhān wa Iqāmah]

"*Adhān*" is an Arabic word meaning *to announce and make aware* and its outward aspect consists of announcing the time of *Ṣalāt* and inviting Moslems to gather for performing this divine ritual.

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[1] Comprehensive exposition of the spiritual and mystical secrets of *Ṣalāt* may be found in the two books *Sirr uṣ-Ṣalāt* (*The Secrets of Ṣalāt*) and *Ādāb uṣ-Ṣalāt* (*The Disciplines of the Prayer, The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, Intrnational Affairs Department, Publisher,1996*) of the perfect mystic Imam Khomeini (r) and also Shahīd-e Thānī's *Ādāb uṣ-Ṣalāt*. In light of the fact that Islamic theosophy [*'irfān*] has a very technical language and contains esoteric theosophical terms, we shall endeavor to elucidate the secrets of *Ṣalāt* in simple terms as much as possible.

[2] Wuḍu is a type of ritual partial ablution that is a prerequisite to *Ṣalāt*. [trans.]

Moreover, "*Iqāmah*" means *to set up or perform* and its apparent facet is getting ready to perform *Ṣalāt* and inviting to the divine worship.

As for the spiritual meaning of *Adhān*, it is summoning all of existence to prepare to attend the presence of the Divine and announcing the good news of the time to appear before the presence of the Divine Oneness. Moreover, according to the illuminated [*ahl-e ma'rifat*], *Iqāmah* is a call for all beings to present themselves before God and stand before Him. *Adhān* begins with four *Takbīr* (i.e. *Allahu Akbar*)[1] whose conspicuous meaning is professing the greatness and magnificence of God. Its inner meaning is professing our inability to properly understand and describe the truth of the Most Divine.[2] By saying *Takbīr* four times, the worshiper regards all the creatures of the external, internal, and ethereal worlds nothing compared to the magnificence of God.

> *After making Wuḍū from the fount of love;*
> *I said four Takbīr and thus professed the triviality of all but Allah.*[3]

After *Takbīr*—the demonstration of God's greatness—is uttered, by declaring the holy invocation "*ashhadu allā ilāha illallāh*"[4], worshipers bear witness to the fact that their Lord is united, and that godhead is exclusive to Allah. In order to emphasize this fact, worshipers repeat this avowal. Then worshipers enter the sanctum of the divine intercessors (the Prophet (ṣ) and Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a)) and by saying "*ashhadu anna muḥammad ar-rasūl ul-lāh*"[1] and "*ashhadu anna 'alīyya-wwaliyyul-lāh*"[2] they attest to the prophethood of Muḥammad (ṣ) and the apostleship and vicegerency of 'Alī ('a). Again, in order to emphasize and establish this fact within their soul, they repeat each avowal. Then they address their entire being and call upon it to hasten towards *Ṣalāt* by saying: "*ḥayya 'alaṣ-ṣalāh*"[3]. In order to prepare their mind and body further for attending the celebration of divine intimacy and to intensify the fires of their enthusiasm, they repeat this command.

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[1] Takbīr is the name of the invocation "الله اکبر" [*Allāhu Akbar*] meaning God is the Greatest. [trans.]

[2] It has been narrated of Imam Ṣādiq ('a) that he asked the opinion of one of his followers about "الله اکبر" [*Allāhu Akbar*]. The follower replied, "God is greater than all objects." The Imam ('a) declared, "Is there any object next to God to which He may be greater?" He then interpreted *Allahu Akbar* thus:

الله اکبرُ مِنْ اَنْ یُوصَفَ

"God is greater than can be described."
(*Baḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 84, p. 257)

[3] من از آن دم که وضو ساختم از چشمه عشق
چار تکبیر زدم یک سره بر هر چه که هست

[4] That is, I attest that there is no god but Allah (the One God): "اَشْهَدُ اَنْ لا اِله اِلّا الله". [trans.]

Then, the worshipers announce the epitome of *Ṣalāt*—which is attaining salvation and bliss—and its superiority over all other deeds. Thus, they call to their perfectionist and liberal nature: "*ḥayya 'alal falāḥ*"[4] and "*ḥayya 'ala khayril 'amal*"[5]. After awakening their nature, they again attest to the greatness of God and then twice declare the holy adage of monotheism: "*lā ilāha illal-lāh*"[6] in order to solidify their admission of inability to describe God and avowal of God's unity within their heart.

In *Iqāmah*, worshipers repeat their previously declared truths and thus renew their covenant with these truths. After recourse to the prophethood and vicegerency and intensifying the fires of enthusiasm for intimacy with the Beloved, by declaring "*qad qāmatiṣ-ṣalāt*"[7] worshipers proclaim their presence before the Magnificent.

### 3. Standing Motionless [*qīyām*]

The outer appearance of *qīyām* is standing upright and straight, free of all distortion and perversity, before God. The spirit of *qīyām* is initiating one's heart into the status of servitude [*'ubūdīyat*] and establishing oneself upon the path of humane righteousness [*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*] and refraining from all immoderations and deviations. Standing in a balanced posture is a symbol of the spiritual and moral balance of worshipers and the equilibrium of fear [*khaūf*] (regarding God) and hope [*rajā'*] (of salvation) within their being, such that neither their fear of God surpasses their hope for salvation, nor their hope for salvation surpasses their fear of God.

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[1] This means, I attest that Muḥammad is God's messenger: "أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً رسولُ الله". [trans.]

[2] The translation of which is, I attest that 'Alī is God's vicegerent: "أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ علياً وليُّ الله". [trans.] It is worthy of note that this term is not part of *Adhān* or *Iqāmah*, even so, saying it is desirable and recommended [*mustaḥabb*].

[3] Which means, hasten towards *Salāt*: "حَيَّ عَلَى الصَّلٰوة" [trans.]

[4] This means, hasten towards salvation: "حَيَّ عَلَى الفَلاح". [trans.]

[5] That is, hasten towards the best of deeds: "حَيَّ عَلَىٰ خَيْرِ العَمَلِ". [trans.]

[6] There is no god but Allah: "لا اله الا الله". [trans.]

[7] Verily, *Salāt* has commenced: "قَدْ قامَتِ الصلوٰة".

One of the etiquettes of *qīyām* is that worshipers must remember that they are standing in the presence of a God who knows them, manifest, secrets and all, and according to a Hadith, is closer to them than their jugular vein. It is befitting that in this state, worshipers bow their heads—which is the noblest part of the body—in humility and as a symbol of modesty and humbleness. They must be shameful of their shortcomings and offences and look at the place where they set their forehead in prostration [*sajdah*], and thus remember their abjectness compared to the grandeur and glory of their Lord.

### 4. Intention [*nīyyat*]

*"Nīyyat"* is the decision and resolution to perform an action. In *Ṣalāt*, *nīyyat* has various degrees that compare with the spiritual statuses of worshipers.

Ordinary people regard *nīyyat* as the intention to obey God in performing *Ṣalāt* in covetousness for rewards or fear of divine retribution. According to the Quran:

﴿يدعون ربهم خوفاً و طمعاً﴾

*"They call upon their Lord in fear and hope."*[1]

According to the illuminated, the intention is to obey God as well as to magnify His Lordship. As stated by the adherents to the path of divine love and rapture [*ahl-e dil*], the intention is to obey God due to enthusiasm and love of the Deity.[2] Finally, according to divine saints

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[1] *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:16.

[2] The holy prophet (ṣ) has stated: "The best of people is one who loves worship, embraces it, and likes it with one's whole heart…" (*Uṣūl-e Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 131)

[*awliyā' ilāhī*] the intention is the resolution to obey while the worshipper has attained the status of annihilation in God [*fanā*].

One of the important etiquettes of *nīyyat,* which encompasses all worship, is sincerity [*ikhlāṣ*]. *Ikhlāṣ* is purging one's actions of all ungodly elements. *Ikhlāṣ*, like human perfection, has various degrees: For ordinary people, *ikhlāṣ* means to purify their worship of hidden and manifest polytheism [*shirk-e āshkār wa pinhān*], such as hypocrisy and vanity. In the worship of the elect [*khawāṣ*], it is purging deeds of avarice (for blessings) and fear (of retribution). According to the advocates of divine love [*ahl-e dil*], *ikhlāṣ* is cleansing one's worship of all egocentricity, selfishness, and narcissist elements.

### 5. Recitation [*qirā'at*]

In the spiritual journey and divine ascension of *Ṣalāt,* recitation also has various degrees and ranks in accordance with the spiritual rank of the worshiper. For ordinary people, recitation means uttering the words of *Ṣalāt* correctly and worthily. The perfection of their recitation is that they deliberate the apparent meaning of the words they are reciting. However, the recitation of the elect is recalling the truths and subtleties of the divine words—as much as they are able to understand—within their hearts and souls. The deeper degrees of recitation are specific to the illuminated [*ahl-e ma'rifat*] and the advocates of divine love [*ahl-e dil*]. For them, after they have gained knowledge of the truths behind God's words and have realized the higher degrees of the interpretation of the Quran within their souls, recitation is the interpreter of their religious ecstasies and spiritual intuition in *Ṣalāt.*

There are secrets in the recitation of the holy *Sūrah Ḥamd* and *Sūrah Tawḥīd* (and other Quranic *Sūrahs* that the worshiper recites in *Ṣalāt*) that for the sake of brevity, we cannot even mention within this treatise.[1]

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[1] For information regarding these issues, see exegeses of the Quran, especially mystical exegeses such as Imam Khomeinī's interpretation of *Sūrah Ḥamd.*

### 6. Bowing [*rukū'*]

It is proper that the worshiper say a *Takbīr* after recitation and before *rukū'*. The etiquette of *Takbīr* is that worshipers keep in mind the greatness and glory of the Divine and remember their own weakness, inability, destitution, and abjectness compared to God. In this state, they must raise their hands beside their ears with their empty palms toward the *Qiblah*[1] and empty-handedly with a heart brimming with fear and hope, regard God superior to all descriptions, and declare His *Takbīr*, then they must go to *rukū'*.

The heart of *rukū'* is that worshipers enter a state of humility and wretchedness before their Lord and observe His glory. *Rukū'* includes glorification [*tasbīḥ*], magnification [*ta'ẓīm*], and praise [*taḥmīd*] of God:

سُبحانَ رَبّيَ العَظيمِ و بِحَمدِهِ.

"Glory be to my Lord, the Magnificent, and praise be to Him."

The truth of *"tasbīḥ"* is elevating God over all descriptions and definitions and the truth of *"ta'ẓīm"* and *"taḥmīd"* is extricating the worshiper from the confines of comparison [*tashbīḥ*] and agnosticism [*ta'ṭīl*].[2] In *rukū'* the worshiper sees through his heart all objects as a manifestation of the names and attributes of the Divine Truth.

این همه عکس می و رنگ مخالف که نمود
یک فروغ رخ ساقی است که در جام افتاد
حسن روی تو به یک جلوه که در آینه کرد
این همه نقش در آینهٔ اوهام افتاد

*All these contrasting colors and images of wine that appear;*
*Are the reflection of the brilliance of the cupbearer's visage.*
*With one materialization of your beautiful countenance in the looking glass;*

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[1] This is the direction of the *Ka'bah* in Mecca towards which Muslims turn to pray in *Ṣalāt*. [trans.]

[2] Refer to the discussion "Understanding Divine Attributes" in section two of current chapter.

*All these images were cast into the mirror of apprehensions.*

### 7. Prostration [*sajdah*]

According to the illuminated, *sajdah* is the apex of *Ṣalāt* and the ultimate position of intimacy with the Beloved. The heart and soul of *sajdah* is rejecting all but God and ascending from all multiplicities [*kithrat*] to the height of Unity. In the state of *sajdah*, which is the state of annihilation in God, the worshiper observes that all objects are transitory and perishable and the truth of their essence is nothing but destitution and neediness towards the Divine Oneness.

عرضه کردم دو جهان بر دل کار افتاده
به جز از عشق تو باقی همه فانی دانست

*I presented both worlds unto my weary heart;*
*Except for your love, it regarded all as transitory.*

### 8. Testimony [*tashahud*]

The essence of *tashahud* is return of worshipers from the state of annihilation and absolute Unity to the world of multiplicities [*'ālam-e kithrat*] while the world of Unity has been unveiled to them. Thus, they testify to God's unity, and append their testimony with praise and veneration of the Divine and repudiation of polytheism. Then they bear witness to the prophethood of the Seal of the Prophets[1] (ṣ) and focus on his status of God's servant.

### 9. Salaam[2]

After returning from this spiritual journey and departing the spiritual world—that is, the place of divine prophets and angels—worshipers first say Salaam to the holder of the rank of Seal of the Prophets and due to his divine holiness, they specifically address the Prophet (ṣ) by saying:

السَّلامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُه.

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[1] According to the Quran (*Sūrah Aḥzāb* 33:40), prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) is the Seal of the Prophets. This means that he is the final prophet or the Seal in the line of divine prophets, which are said to number 124,000. Hence, the teachings of Islam are God's final revelation unto humanity. [trans.]

[2] This is the Islamic salutation wishing health and peace. [trans.]

> "Salaam to you, O Prophet and Allah's mercy and blessings upon you."

Then they center their attention on the divine angels and the rest of the prophets—who were their companions in this spiritual journey—and because the worshipers too were their companions in this spiritual journey, they include themselves in their Salaam by saying:

السَّلامُ عَلَيْنا و عَلىٰ عِبادِ الله الصّالِحينَ.

> "Salaam upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah."

Finally, they address them all and say Salaam to them. By retiring from this status, the ascension of *Ṣalāt* ends.

## Section Four

## Cosmology [jahān shināsī]

In addition to endeavoring to understand our Lord and ourselves, our human curiosity and inquisitiveness provokes us to attempt to understand the world by studying the phenomena around us and the laws governing them. Basically, we can regard the inception and development of many human sciences an effect of the innate human need to understand the universe. In other words, the sphere of our awareness is not restricted to *Allah-awareness* and *self-awareness*. In fact, the perfection of humanity's knowledge depends on understanding the third side of the triangle of knowledge, that is, *world-awareness*.[1]

In previous sections, we briefly explained the Islamic perspective about theology and anthropology. Herein, the question discussed is whether Islam has presented information regarding understanding the world in addition to these two subjects. In other words, essentially, can one speak of an issue called *Islamic cosmology*?

A glance at Islam's revelational knowledge (i.e. the Holy Quran and authentic narrations [*riwāyāt-e mu'tabar*]) presents us with an affirmative answer. Yea, Islam has presented many truths regarding the origin of the universe, natural and metaphysical phenomena, and the laws governing them. There are innumerable Quranic verses and Hadith that speak of cosmological matters. Due to the infallibility of divine revelation, the intellect requires that all Moslems have faith in

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1- We must note that by world-awareness or cosmology in the present discourse, especially when used in contrast to understanding God and humanity, we mean the study of all beings in existence except God and humans. Thus, from this perspective, cosmology is more specific in meaning than worldview. Naturally, due to the close rapport between God, humanity, and the world, sometimes cosmology is interwoven with theological and anthropological issues such that accurately distinguishing between them would be difficult.

the eternal verity of these teachings and consider them the absolute truth.

## Religious and Scientific Cosmology

The existence of cosmological truths in the Quran does not make it a cosmogonical, geological, or biological textbook; rather, there are differences that completely differentiate the Quran from texts on natural sciences. Even disregarding the infallibility of Quranic teachings, one of the fundamental differences is in its *objectives*. The ultimate mission and aim of the Quran is *guiding* humans toward true perfection, salvation, and bliss. Therefore, everything that the Quran states about the world is related to and serves *this* purpose. Even though the cosmological verses of the Quran present us with truths about world phenomena, understanding these truths is not the ultimate purpose, but a passageway to better understanding God, His attributes, humanity's status in existence, and the *telos* of human creation. In other words, cosmology is in the service of religious anthropology and theology. Consequently, the general method of the Quran is to introduce natural phenomena according to their connection and relation with God and humanity. However, understanding phenomena and the laws governing them is the final purpose in the natural sciences. If there is any other purpose in natural sciences, it is nothing but human domination and exploitation of nature.

This difference is the basis for various additional differences. For example, because the purpose of natural sciences is *understanding the world*, scientists regard themselves obligated to research all phenomena in connection with their field of study.[1] However, since the Quran's ultimate purpose is guiding humanity towards salvation and bliss, it is selective of natural phenomena and only stresses phenomena that are related to the telos of the Quran. Accordingly, it has only presented cosmological issues that are effective in attaining this purpose. This distinction has an important consequence; the

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1- One of the positive points of cosmogony—i.e. scientific cosmology—is its unique precision and fastidiousness which is applied throughout various experiments and calculations. On the other hand, due to its reliance on physical perceptions, it is unable to explain metaphysical phenomena. Therefore, it is befitting that these sciences remain reticent regarding these phenomena and refrain from attempts to deny or refute them.

expectation that the Quran should answer all conceivable questions regarding all the diverse natural sciences (such as physics, chemistry, biology, cosmogony, etc.) is completely irrelevant.[1]

Doubtless, presenting a somewhat comprehensive discussion on Islamic cosmology would require the composition of many books and articles. Here, we shall suffice with several general trends in religious cosmology. Afterwards, we shall present a short account of Islam's view regarding several natural and metaphysical phenomena.

## The Invisible [*ghayb*] and the Manifest [*shahādat*]

An important principle in Islamic cosmology is differentiating between the *Invisible world* [*'ālam-e ghayb*] and the *Manifest world* [*'ālam-e shahādat*]. The words "*ghayb*" and "*shahādat*" respectively mean "invisible" and "manifest". The definition of "*ghayb*" is that which is outside the sphere of our perception and awareness; as opposed to "*shahādat*" which is that which is perceivable. According to these definitions, it is clear that "*ghayb*" and "*shahādat*" are relative. That is, it is possible for a specific object be "*ghayb*" with respect to a particular person with distinct sensory faculties and be "*shahādat*" for a different person with dissimilar sensory faculties.[2]

With regard to this explanation, in Islamic cosmology, the *Invisible world* [*'ālam-e ghayb*] is the part of existence that is imperceptible by human senses and is indiscernible with normal sensory experience. According to Islamic belief, part of existence is invisible to us humans and thus, we cannot perceive all truths about the world and external entities using sensory faculties. The Islamic teaching that segregates "*ghayb*" from "*shahādat*" situates Islam in opposition to materialist and secularist schools—which refute all nonmaterial and imperceptible facts. According to this doctrine, there are truths that human senses can never understand. The Holy Essence of God, angels, and revelational phenomena are examples of the Invisible

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[1] Some scholars believe that all sciences, technology, and knowledge have been expressed in the Holy Quran, but we have yet to find the necessary tools to extract them. Naturally, proving this theory would be extremely difficult and as long as it is not proven, it shall remain a hypothesis.

[2] For instance, a truth may be "*shahādat*" for our intellect and be "*ghayb*" regarding our senses.

World. The Holy Quran regards *faith in the Invisible* the first characteristic of the pious and the prerequisite for human guidance:

﴿ذلكَ الكتابُ لا رَيْبَ فيهِ هدىً لِلمُتَّقينَ. الّذينَ يُؤمِنونَ بالغَيبِ...﴾

> *"That is the book wherein there is no doubt [and it is] a guidance to the pious. They who have faith in the Invisible..."*[1]

Obviously, the invisible part of existence only pertains to beings with limited knowledge and awareness. This segregation is meaningless regarding God—who is omniscient. This is why the glorious Quran introduces God as the "*'ālim ul-ghaībi wa ash-shahadah*"[2] (Knower of the Invisible and the Manifest) and "*'allām ul-qhuyūb*"[3] (Knower of All Things Hidden).

This distinction signifies that existence is not restricted to the natural world; rather, the world of perceptions is merely one of the worlds in existence. It is, in fact, the lowliest of worlds. More elevated worlds exist that cannot be perceived by the senses.[4] The Quran swears by both these worlds in order to emphasize the existence of an unseen world beyond the natural world:

﴿فلا أُقسمُ بما تُبْصِرون. و ما لا تُبْصِرون﴾

> *"No [it is not so]! I swear by what you see; and by what you see not."*[5]

Even though there are fundamental differences between the *Invisible* and *Manifest Worlds*, there is a deep and unbreakable bond between them. Everything in the *Manifest World* is rooted in the *Invisible*. The Quran reveals the profound fact that the source of all things is in God's possession and that all natural entities are in fact, a relegated form of a truth that resides in the metaphysical world:

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[1] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:2-3.

[2] *Sūrah Tawbah* 9:94.

[3] *Sūrah Tawbah* 9:78.

[4] Islamic thinkers have uniquely depicted the various aspects of existence. According to philosophers, after the essence of God is the world of pure intelligents [*'ālam-e 'uqūl*], and inferior to that is the world of ideas [*'ālam-e mithāl*]. Finally, there is the natural world which is the lowliest world regarding its existential status. In addition, Sufis divide the main worlds into five planes: realm of the divinity [*lāhūt*], realm of omnipotence [*jabarūt*], angelic realm [*malakūt*], the realm of sovereignty [*mūlk*], and the realm of humanity [*nāsūt*]. The three first planes are invisible and the other two are manifest.

[5] *Sūrah Ḥāqqah* 69:38-39.

﴿وَ إنْ مِن شيءٍ إلّا عندنا خزآئِنُهُ و ما نُنَزِّله إلّا بقدرٍ مَّعلوم﴾

> *"And there is naught but that its treasuries are with Us, and We send it down not save in specific amounts."*[1]

چرخ با این اختران نغز و خوش و زیباستی
صورتی در زیر دارد آنچه در بالاستی

*The heavens full of stars are wonderful, delightful, beautiful;*
*What is above has an appearance below.*

### The Justness [*ḥaqq madārī*] of the World

Another prominent principle in Islamic cosmology is that the world has been founded upon justice and it revolves in the orbit of equity. The Noble Quran speaks of the *justness* of the world in various verses:

﴿ما خَلَقَ الله السّماوات وَ الأَرض و ما بينهمآ إِلّا بالحقّ و أَجَلٍ مسمّىً و إِنَّ كَثيراً مِنَ النّاسِ بِلِقآئِ رَبِّهِم لَكَفِرُون﴾

> *"Allah has not created the heavens and earth and all in between save in justice and an appointed end, yet surely many people deny the encounter with their Lord."*[2]

Additionally, the Quran retells the state of people of God who after contemplating Creation call upon their Lord in this manner:

﴿ربّنا ما خلقتَ هذا باطلاً﴾

> *"O Lord! You have not created this [world] in vain!"*[3]

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1- *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:21.

2- *Sūrah Rūm* 30:8.

3- *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* 3:191. The Quran introduces justness in the world in various manners. Sometimes it talks of the creation of the heavens and earth based on justice (such as *Sūrah An'ām* 6:73; *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* 14:19; *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:85; etc.). At other

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Due to the extensiveness of the word "justice" [*ḥaqq*], the justness of the world of creation has a comprehensive definition with various aspects. One facet of this truth is that the world is ordered and based on divine laws and traditions. Islamic cosmology verifies that natural and metaphysical laws govern worldly phenomena and introduces these laws as divine traditions. In other words, *divine fate* [*taqdīr*] requires that the world be organized by specific laws and that worldly phenomena work under set restrictions. In representation of this truth, the Quran declares that the ordered movement of celestial bodies is divine fate:

﴿و الشّمس تَجرى لمستقرّ لّهآ، ذلك تقديرُ العزيزِ الْعَلیم﴾

> *"And the sun moves within a set orbit; that is the destiny (or decree) of the Omnipotent, the Omniscient."*[1]

There is an aspect of God's providence regarding the governing laws of the universe that has a significant effect on the Islamic worldview: God who has made these governing laws can also violate them. His will and providence is transcendent to all laws. In other words, God is the "rule-maker" and "rule-breaker":

از سبب سازیش من سوداییم
وز سبب‌سوزیش سوفسطاییم

*I am lovesick due to His rule-making;*
*And I am sophist due to His rule-breaking.*

---

times it emphasizes that, the creation of the world is not in vain (such as *Sūrah Ṣād* 38:27). In addition, in some verses it states that God has not created the world for sport (*Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:16):

﴿و ما خلقنا السّماواتِ و الأَرضَ و ما بینَهُما لاعبین﴾

> *"And we have not created the heavens and earth and all that is in between for sport."*

We must note that in the Quran, the term "heavens and earth" especially when accompanied by the term "ما بینهما" (all in between) is generally an allusion to the entire natural world.

1- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:38.

God's hands are not tied by traditions and laws that He Himself has ordained. In fact, whenever divine wisdom requires, nature's course is altered and something occurs contrary to the normal order of the world. Accepting that the Divine Will is not restricted to the framework of natural laws opens the foundation to understanding and accepting other tenets of faith, such as the concept of *miracles*.

### Finality of Creation

The justness of the world also manifests in the purposefulness or finality [*hadafmandī /ghāyatmandī*] of the world of creation. According to Islamic cosmology, the caravan of existence neither travels in a confused and bewildered way towards an unknown objective nor walks randomly and accidentally towards some obscure future. In actuality, the Creator guides the world towards a predetermined end. The term "*Ajal im-musammā*"[1], which has been mentioned earlier, reveals the fact that existence is advancing towards a determined and set terminus.

It must be said that a person's belief in the principle of existential finality and non-futility of Creation serves an important role in one's life. One who believes in this principle has no room for nihilist thoughts and does not perceive life and the world as vain and futile. Such persons continually endeavor to harmonize the music of their lives with the general rhythm of creation synchronizing their life objectives with their ultimate telos.

### Best Possible System

In Islamic cosmology, the pervading order in the world is considered the *best* of all possible systems. As we have stated in the discussion on divine wisdom, the sagacity of God requires that He create the best and most perfect world among all illimitably possible worlds. It seems that the Quran indicates this fact where it states:

﴿الّذي أحسنَ كلَّ شيءٍ خَلَقَهُ﴾

*"[He is] who has created all things perfect."*[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Rūm* 30:8; (أجَلٍ مُسَمّى) means appointed end. [trans.]

[2] *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:7.

Naturally, it may seem that because this world contains evils, and a world free of evils is better than one soiled by them, this world is therefore not the best of all possible worlds. However, by briefly referring to our concise discussion on the philosophy of evil, the fallaciousness of this idea is revealed because within each evil various wisdoms are embedded that justify their existence and make them beneficial to the ideal perfection of the world.

جهان چون چشم و خال و خط و ابروست

که هر چیزی به جای خویش نیکوست

*The world is like eyes and moles and hair and brows;*
*Everything is beautiful in its appropriate place.*

In short, according to Islam, all of creation is virtuous, beautiful, and perfect, and what our superficial eyes perceive as ugly is, in actuality, a part of the beautiful masterpiece of creation and a building block in the balanced structure of the cosmos.

Belief in the virtuosity and beauty of the world has a great impact on one's happiness and bliss. This is because, believing in essential wickedness of existence and ugliness and imbalance of creation traps humanity in the snare of pessimistic philosophies and results in nothing but cynicism and despair. Divine saints always see the world as a manifestation of the absolute beauty of God. They love the world because they deem it a symbol and display of the perfections of their Beloved; they cry out that, "By the world I swear, I am exuberant that the world is made exuberant by Him."[1]

### Intrinsic Consciousness and Universal Praise [*tasbīḥ-e ‘umūmī*]

According to materialist schools, material objects do not enjoy consciousness and awareness. However, Islamic cosmology states that all elements of existence even the lifeless phenomena of the natural world possess a type of intrinsic consciousness [*shu‘ūr-e bāṭinī*] relating to their Creator. By virtue of this consciousness they praise, glorify, and thank their Lord:

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[1] That is, "به جهان خرم از آنم که جهان خرم از اوست".

> *"The seven heavens and the earth and all within them extol Him, and there is nothing that does not proclaim His praise, and yet you do not realize their exaltation."*[1]

This verse clearly states that all of God's creations are engaged in veneration and exaltation of the Divine. Since these actions cannot be executed without awareness and understanding, this verse reveals a universal consciousness in all components of the world.

Nonetheless, various exegetes believe that this universal praise means nothing more than the fact that each creation is a symbol of the existence of the Creator and His attributes of beauty and greatness. Allegorically, it is similar to a work of art that conveys the artistry and proficiency of its creator, and in a way, praises the perfection of its designer and glorifies Him of fault and inadequacy. However, this interpretation is incompatible with various evidences regarding this verse. In explanation, this definition of praise and exaltation is not something we cannot understand because the Quran states:

﴿... و لکن لّا تفقهونَ تسبیحَهُم﴾

> *"...and yet, you do not realize their exaltation."*[2]

کوه و دریا و درختان، همه در تسبیح‌اند
نه همه مستمعی فهم کند این اسرار

*The mountains, seas, and trees are all praising Him;*
*Not all listeners can perceive these secrets.*[3]

Thus, according to Islamic belief, even though we cannot perceive this general consciousness and universal praise with our superficial senses, all constituents of existence are engaged in praising their Lord.[4]

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[1] *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:44.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] This verse is from *Sa'dī.* The second hemistich is a poetic interpretation of (... لا تفقهونَ تسبیحَهُم).

[4] Due to this fact, it has been stated of some illuminated mystics that in some of their transcendental spiritual and mystical states, they have heard the entrancing

## God and the Universe

As we have stated at the outset of this section, one of the qualities of Islamic cosmology is that world phenomena are not regarded separate from their Creator. Islam always considers the relation of the world with regard to its originating agent and recognizes all beings in light of their connection with God. All schools that believe in some manner in God as the First Cause depict the connection between God and the world. Sometimes He is regarded by other schools as the *Prime Mover*, who gave the caravan of existence its initial momentum in the eternal past. At other times, the relationship of God and the universe is reduced to the relationship of a watchmaker and a watch—a watchmaker who created and refined the world in the eternal past, after which the inner workings of the watch automatically caused the continuation of existence![1]

However, according to the Islamic perspective, the connection of God and His creation is much more profound. Not only is God the Creator and Originator of all creatures, He is their Contriver and Preserver. To state matters differently, in every moment of existence, the entire universe and its constituents are dependent upon and sustained by God such that if divine grace were to be interrupted for even a moment, their existence would instantaneously become void. In philosophical terms, the world not only needs God for its *inception*, it also needs Him for its *perpetuation*. Therefore, Islam teaches that God does not sit by and merely watch the events and incidents occurring in the world; rather, the Divine Essence, despite being exalted and magnificent, accompanies even the lowliest elements of existence:

﴿و هو معكم أينَ ما كُنتُم﴾

*"And He is with you wherever you may be."*[2]

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exaltation of various creations. It is also said of the prophet of Islam (ṣ) that one of his miracles was that he could hear the praise and glorification of grains of sand.

[1] In divine philosophy and theosophy, the relationship of God and the world is rendered in unique manners. Philosophers mostly explain it in the form of a causal relationship, whereas mystics mostly emphasize theophany [*tajallī*] and manifestation [*ẓuhūr*], and regard the universe a manifestation and symbol of divine names and attributes.

[2] *Sūrah Ḥadīd* 57:4.

Obviously, this is not spatial accompaniment because God transcends space. This accompaniment signifies that God is the absolute preserver and upholder of all of existence.[1] Therefore, God is the closest being to His creations—while this proximity does not cause His limitation or incarnation in mundane objects—and also He is the apogee of sublimity and ascendancy—while this culmination does not result in His neglect of or remoteness from His creations. In our religious texts, there are profound interpretations of the relationship of God and His creations. Imam 'Alī ('a) has elucidated this connection in various erudite sermons using varied terms:

مع كل شيء لا بمقارنة و غير كلّ شيء لا بمزايلة.

> "[God] is with all things without being their partner and is apart from all things without being distant from them."[2]

عالٍ في دُنوّهُ و دانٍ في علوّه.

> "[God] is close in His sublimity, and is Sublime in His closeness."[3]

Thus, in Islamic cosmology, the transcendence and immanence of God coexist in an appropriate manner, whereas most other creeds only emphasize one of these two issues and have refrained from converging them.[4]

## Unity in Action

One of the tenets of Islam, which facilitates understanding the relationship between God and the world, is the principle of *unity in action* [*Tawḥīd-e af'ālī*]. Correct understanding of unity in action can help us understand the depth of God's link with creation and the critical presence of the Divine Will on the stage of existence.

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[1] Islamic philosophers term this accompaniment, "*sustainment simultaneity*" [*ma'iyat-e qayyūmī*]; that is, the togetherness of a sustainer entity and beings whose preservation depend on that entity.

[2] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, sermon 1.

[3] 'Allāmah Majlisī, *Baḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 9, p. 189.

[4] For instance, in Hinduism, God's transcendency is emphasized to such degree that His existence is totally severed from the world. In contemporary Christianity, even though the principle of Jesus ('a) as the incarnation of God depicts a close relationship between God and the World, God's purity and transcendence is thoroughly impaired.

Unity in action means, the only independent agent—whose *agency* does not rely on any other entity—is God. Consequently, the agency of all other entities is a token of His agency and cannot be realized without His explicit permission and providence. Thus, all occurrences in existence are acts of God and under His influence and will.

Belief in unity in action opens new portals to understanding the world. A person who believes in unity in action perceives the Divine Will in all places and discerns the effects of His agency in all phenomena and incidents. The world, in all its vastness and immensity, and with all its colorfulness and diversity, is the manifestation of a united will. Moreover, all alterations and transformations originate from a changeless and exclusive fountainhead:

لا حولَ و لا قوّةَ الّا بالله.

"There is no force or power but Allah."

Heeding the cosmological tenets of Islam assists us in sketching the general lines of Islamic cosmology. Additionally, in light of these precepts, we may better understand the theological and anthropological teachings of Islam. Here, it is appropriate that we explain, in short, various religious standpoints about world phenomena. As we have already stated, Islamic cosmology is not restricted to deciphering natural and material phenomena—it also includes supernatural creatures. Accordingly, we shall divide our discussion into two chief parts: Natural phenomena (the natural world) and paranormal entities (the supernatural world).

### The Natural World

The Quran speaks of natural phenomena in many verses. The variety of natural phenomena, the multitude of Quranic verses on this issue, and the limitation of this treatise all compel us to condense the material and shorten our discussion.

### Creation of the Natural World

Various Quranic verses state that the world was created in six days.

﴿إنَّ ربّكم اللهُ الّذي خلق السّماوات و الأَرض في سِتَّةِ أَيامٍ ثُـــمَّ اســـتوى علـــى العرش﴾

*"Surely your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days, then established Himself atop the Throne."*[1]

Keeping in mind the fact that in the Quran, the term ﴿السّـــماوات و الأَرض﴾ (the heavens and earth) usually indicates the entire natural world,[2] this verse signifies that the process of the natural world's creation took six days. However, what does *day* signify here? Due to the two following facts, we can state that in this verse, "day" [*yaūm*] indicates a specific time interval whose exact span is unknown to us. First, before the formation of our solar system in its current form, there was no such thing as day and night (according to the common usage of these words). Second, the Quran also uses the word "day" [*yaūm*] to indicate a specific time span.[3] Therefore, we can only accurately state that the creation of the natural world occurred during six time spans or eras. Other verses indicate that the skies were created in two eras;[4] the earth was created in two eras,[5] and finally, the reserves and provisions of the earth were also created in two eras.[6]

## 1. The Heavens and the Earth

Many verses speak of the seven heavens:

﴿اللهُ الّذي خلق سبعَ سماواتٍ﴾

*"It is Allah who created the seven heavens."*[7]

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1- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:54.

2- Sometimes, in the Quran, the word (سماء) [*samā'*] is used with another meaning disparate from material skies; it seems rather that it means the metaphysical planes. For examples, see: *Sūrah Mā'idah* 5:112, 5:114.

3- *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:47; and *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:4.

4- *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 41:12.

5- *Ibid* 41:9.

6- *Ibid* 41:10.

7- *Sūrah Ṭalāq* 65:12. Some scholars believe that the literal meaning of the number "seven" is not intended in this verse. They believe it signifies the copiousness of its noun (heavens). However, this belief is not compatible with the semblance of such verses, especially verses that employ the number seven without a noun:

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Additionally, various verses state that in the beginning, there was a homogeneous universe consisted of a smoky or vaporous substance or aerosol [*dukhān*], which God later formed into seven skies:

> *"Next, He proceeded with the sky, which was as aerosol. Then He said to the sky and the earth, 'Come thou in obedience or by force!' They said, 'We come in obedience!' He subsequently ordained them as seven skies in two days."*[1]

In truth, we know very little of the seven skies. What we do know has been extracted from the Quran.

These skies are arranged above one another:

﴿الّذي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَماواتٍ طِبَاقاً﴾

> *"[Allah is] who created the seven heavens in layers."*[2]

Additionally, the stars that shine at night exist in the lowest of the seven skies:

﴿إنّا زيّنّا السّمآءَ الدُّنيا بزينةِ الكواكِب﴾

> *"Surely, We have adorned the sky of the world with the ornamentation of stars."*[3]

In contrast to sky, the Quran speaks of the earth as a singular noun.[4] In describing the earth, the Quran mostly emphasizes qualities that illustrate the benefits of this telluric haven for humanity and naturally, it reminds of God's characteristic of Creativity in all places.[5]

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﴿و بنينا فوقكم سبعاً شداداً﴾

*"And We have built above you seven robust [heavens]." Sūrah Naba'* 78:12.

[1] *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 41:11-12.

[2] *Sūrah Mulk* 67:3. Also, see: *Sūrah Nūḥ* 71:15.

[3] *Sūrah Ṣāffāt* 37:6. Also, see: *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 41:12.

[4] The term "Seven Terras" is used in a small number of Hadith. This may be an indication of the large pieces of land on the earth. This is because the word terra or earth [*arḍ*] is also used to mean pieces of land.

[5] These verses are interesting examples of the synthesis of cosmology, theology, and anthropology in the Quran.

According to the Quran, God has ordained the world for humans as an expansive bed,[1] a docile mount,[2] a place of lodging[3] and tranquility,[4] and a reserve for sustenance.[5] Moreover, in various verses, after indicating that God brought new life to the earth by sending down rain, the Quran states that this phenomenon is an example of resurrection:

> *"And of His signs is that you see the earth lifeless, and then when We send down water upon it, it quivers and flourishes. Surely, He who revives it is also reviver of the dead."*[6]

### 2. Celestial Bodies

The Quran regards celestial bodies submissive to God. It stresses that the movements and effects of these bodies are according to a plan that the Creator of the World has set for them:

﴿وَ الشَّمسَ وَ القَمَرَ و النُّجُومَ مُسَخَّراتٍ بِأَمرِهِ﴾

> *"And [He created] the sun and moon and stars, subservient to His command."*[7]

Of the benefits of stars, other than that they are the adornments of the sky and make it beautiful,[8] is that we can use them to find our way on land and sea.[9] Furthermore, various Quranic verses reveal the fact that celestial bodies move in determined orbits such that they do not collide in normal circumstances. In *Sūrah Yāsīn*, after speaking of the movements of the earth and moon, it is stated that these two celestial bodies never collide, because they float in set orbits:

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1- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:22.
2- *Sūrah Mulk* 67:15.
3- *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:64.
4- *Sūrah Zukhruf* 43:10; and *Sūrah Naba'* 78:6.
5- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:10.
6- *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 41:39.
7- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:54.
8- *Sūrah Ṣāffāt* 37:6.
9- *Sūrah An'ām* 6:97.

﴿وَ كلٌ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسبَحونَ﴾

*"And each drifts in an orbit."*[1]

ماه و خورشید به منزل، چو امر تو رسند
یار مه‌روی مرا نیز به من باز رسان

*The sun and moon attain their places at your command;*
*So also, return to me my pale-faced sweetheart.*

### 3. Terrestrial Phenomena

Many Quranic verses speak of natural earthly phenomena. Mountains have been identified as anchorages [*rawāsī*] or nails [*aūtād*] that cause the steadiness and solidification of the earth and prevent earthquakes[2] and they are also convenient refuges for humans.[3] Various verses also indicate that even though mountains seem tenacious and immobile, they move like clouds.[4] Moreover, various verses indicate the effect of rain in generating stationary waters (seas),[5] free-flowing springs,[6] and plant growth.[7]

Additionally, the Quran states that God has made the seas obedient to humanity, so that they may both sail upon it[8] and utilize its food reserves and hidden jewels[9]—such as pearls. Other verses illuminate the functions of wind and clouds and their advantages to humans.[10]

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1- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:40. This verse shows that at the time that the Ptolemaic system was prevalent in scientific circles, the Quran rejected this theory. This is because this verse states that celestial bodies drift in space; whereas, according to the Ptolemaic system, the skies cannot be *lacerated and mended* and that heavenly bodies move *with* the skies not *within* them.

2- *Sūrah Ra'd* 13:3; *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:31; and *Sūrah Naba'* 78:7.

3- *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:81.

4- *Sūrah Naml* 27:88. This may be an indication of the axial spin or the orbital revolution of the earth.

5- *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:18.

6- *Sūrah Zumar* 39:21.

7- *Sūrah 'Abas* 80:25-32; and *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:57.

8- *Sūrah Jāthīyah* 45:12.

9- *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:14.

10- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:57; *Sūrah Rūm* 30:48; and *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:9.

## 4. Plants and Animals

The Quran indicates the gendered system (the state of being female or male) of plants and emphasizes their balance and beauty.[1] According to the Quran, God causes the germination of seeds and fruiting of trees by sending down rain and thus provides the sustenance of humans, and wild and domestic animals.[2] Furthermore, the diversity and range of plants are considered signs of God.[3]

The Quran regards the soaring of birds an act of God and thus enumerates this phenomenon as one of His signs.[4] Additionally, several uses of domestic animals are specified in various verses, including transportation of loads, source of food and clothing, etc.[5] The Quran also declares that the milk-making process in animal bodies is a lesson.[6]

The Quran especially favors various specific animals such as the honeybee and regards the structure of their hives and their honey making industry a sign for the thoughtful.[7]

Again, we must stress the fact that due to their function of guidance our religious texts regard phenomena of the natural world from a specific point of view and pursue explicit objectives by presenting cosmological issues. Some of these objectives are:

1. Laying the foundation for human contemplation of the order of the world

2. Familiarity with divine attributes; such as knowledge, wisdom, and power

3. Presentation of evidence for divine unity, especially unity in action and its various branches such as unity in lordship and world administration [*tadbīr-e ʻālam*]

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[1] *Sūrah Raʻd* 13:3; *Sūrah Qāf* 50:7; *Sūrah Shuʻarā'* 26:7; and *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:19.

[2] *Sūrah ʻAbas* 80:25-32.

[3] *Sūrah Anʻām* 6:99.

[4] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:79; and *Sūrah Mulk* 67:19.

[5] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:5-8.

[6] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:66.

[7] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:68-69.

4. Preparing humans so they may rise above the appearances of the world and realize the truths that lay beyond worldly veneers and perceive God's hand above all natural causes

5. Cultivation of love, passion, and affection towards God

6. Arousing the feeling of gratitude through enumeration of divine blessings

## The Supernatural World

We previously stated that in Islamic cosmology, portions of the world of creation pertain to supernatural creatures. Here we shall take a glance at Islam's perspective on immaterial entities.

### 1. Angels

One of the definite tenets of Islamic cosmology is the existence of entities called angels [*malak*]. Many Quranic verses and Hadith speak of angels and their qualities, attributes, and actions. Here, we shall succinctly indicate some of Islam's teachings regarding these divine creations:

### a. The Nature of Angels:

The Holy Quran does not clearly speak of the nature and essence of angels. It is evident that angels have a different nature than humans and other intelligent creations, such as jinn.[1] However, the reality of their essence is a controversial issue. Some Muslim scholars believe they are immaterial and incorporeal entities. Others believe that they have subtle bodies, which are different from non-subtle bodies, that have three dimensions, weight, and mass and can be perceived by normal senses. Nevertheless, all agree that angels cannot be perceived by the outward senses of humans.[2]

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1- In differentiation between humans and angels, Imam 'Alī ('a) has stated:

لَم يَسكُنوا الأصلابَ وَ لَم يَقتَنِموا الأرحامَ وَ لَم يُخلَقوا مِنْ ماءٍ معينٍ

"Angels do not reside in loins [of fathers] and are not born of wombs [of mothers] and have not been created from ignoble water."

2- Muslim philosophers regard angels as incorporeal entities, some of whom possess absolute intellectual incorporeality while others enjoy transitive incorporeality and therefore can hold various material qualities such as shape.

**b. The Immaculacy and Worship of Angels:**

The essence of angels is completely intellectual and has no taint of carnality or hedonistic desires. Thus, they continuously worship and glorify their Lord and never defy or rebel against God. The Quran describes angels thus:

﴿بَلْ عِبادٌ مُكْرَمون. لايَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالقَولِ وَ هُم بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُون﴾

> *"Rather, [angels] are noble servants. They do not overtake Him in speech, and they perform as He commands."*[1]

In addition, of the angels that guard hell it states:

﴿لا يَعْصُونَ اللهَ مآ أَمَرَهُم وَ يَفعَلُونَ ما يُؤْمَرُون﴾

> *"They disobey not Allah in what He commands and perform what they are commanded."*[2]

**c. Divine Mission [*risālat-e ilāhī*]:**

Angels have been appointed by God with divine missions:

﴿اللهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ المَلائِكَةِ رُسُلاً...﴾

> *"Allah appoints of the angels, messengers ..."*[3]

With regard to the role of angels in world administration [*tadbīr-e 'ālam*], we can state that their mission encompasses two functions. That is, their *genetic mission* [*risālat-e takwīnī*], which is administration of world affairs and performing divine commands, and their *legislative mission* [*risālat-e tashrī'ī*], which is intermediacy in divine revelation unto prophets.

**d. The Occupations of Angels:**

The Noble Quran has enumerated many deeds for angels.[4] Transmitting divine revelation to the prophets,[5] administration of world affairs and mediation in imparting divine blessings upon God's creatures,[1] repentance and intercession on behalf of the faithful,[2] aiding the faithful[3], damning unbelievers,[4] recording people's deeds,[5] and taking souls at the time of death[6] are several divine commissions that angels undertake. Angels are also present in the world of *Barzakh*[7] and the afterlife; some reside in heaven,[8] and others are the keepers of Gehenna/Hell [*jahannam*] and its inhabitants.[9]

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[1] *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:26-27.

[2] *Sūrah Taḥrīm* 66:6.

[3] *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:75. Additionally, see: *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:1.

[4] It must be noted that some of these affairs are specifically stated in Quranic verses while others are inferred from various signs and indications in the Quran.

[5] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:2, 16:102; and *Sūrah 'Abas* 80:16.

In addition, Angels continuously worship, revere, and praise God. They never stop and never do anything else. According to the Quran:

﴿و مَنْ عندهُ لا يَستَكبِرُونَ عَن عِبادَتِهِ و لا يَستَحْسِرُون. يُسَبِّحُون اللَّيلَ و النَّهارَ لا يَفتُرُون﴾

> *"And those who are with Him never wax too proud to serve Him and never grow weary. They glorify Him night and day without remit."*[10]

**e. The Hierarchy and Order of Angels:**

According to the previous discussions, angels are divided into various echelons based on their various commissions. The fact whether various orders of angels are typically and essentially different or not is obscure to us. This much can be derived from the Quran and traditions that angels do possess various ranks and echelons and some are subordinate to others. The Quran declares that each angel possesses a determined station and rank:

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[1] *Sūrah Nāzi'āt* 79:5; and *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:4.

[2] *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:7; *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:28.

[3] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:124-125.

[4] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:141; and *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:87.

[5] *Sūrah Yūnus* 10:21; *Sūrah Zukhruf* 43:80; and *Sūrah Infiṭār* 82:11.

[6] *Sūrah An'ām* 6:61; *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:97.

[7] *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:28, 16:32. *Barzakh* literally means the barrier between two things. It is an intermediate state between death and resurrection. The Hebrew equivalent to *Barzakh* is Sheol. In Catholic doctrine a close equivalent is purgatory. [trans.]

[8] *Sūrah Zumar* 39:73; and *Sūrah Anbīyā'* 21:103.

[9] *Sūrah Muddaththir* 74:31.

[10] *Sūrah Anbīyā'* 21:19-20.

﴿وَ ما مِنّآ إِلّا لَهُ مَقامٌ مَعلومٌ﴾

*"And there are none of us (angels) save who has a determined rank."*[1]

Moreover, various Quranic verses reveal that the Angel of Revelation (i.e. *Gabriel*) has various aides that are subordinate to him.[2] The Angel of Death (i.e. *Azrael*) also has agents among the angels.[3] Various traditions indicate that *Gabriel* [*jibrā'īl*], *Michael* [*mīkā'īl*], *Israfel* [*isrāfīl*], and *Azrael* [*'izrā'īl*] possess uniquely lofty ranks.

### f. Incarnation of Angels:

Even though angels are intangible, they can be incarnated in human form. The Quran verifies this fact by relating various historic occurrences. For example, various visits by angles to Abraham ('a) and Lot ('a) and the embodiment of a divine angel as a human to bestow Jesus ('a) upon Mary ('a) were some occurrences of the incarnation of angels in human form.

## 2. Jinn

The jinn are another of God's creations that cannot be experienced with the senses under normal circumstances. The existence of jinn is an unequivocal concept in Islamic cosmology since various Quranic verses and Hadith clearly confirm this truth. The seventy-second *Sūrah* of the Quran is named Jinn in which a conversation of a group of jinn who had become Muslim has been recorded.

### a. The Essence of Jinn:

In contrast to the angels, the Quran explicitly speaks of the essence of the jinn's creation:

﴿وَ خَلَقَ الجآنَّ مِن مارِجٍ مِن نارٍ﴾

*"And He created the jinn of a smokeless fire."*[4]

However, it is not clear whether the fire that is the essence of the jinn is the result of combustion or if it is essentially different.[1] What is

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1- *Sūrah Ṣāffāt* 37:164.
2- *Sūrah Takwīr* 81:21.
3- *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:11; and *Sūrah An'ām* 6:61.
4- *Sūrah Raḥmān* 55:15.

clear is that the fiery nature of the jinn permits them to traverse vast distances at staggering speeds and perform miraculous deeds that normal humans cannot accomplish without special tools.[2]

**b. The Creational Antecedence of Jinn over Humans:**

Another item extracted from the Quran is that the jinn have been created before humans. In *Sūrah Ḥijr* it is stated:

﴿وَ الجَانَّ خَلَقْنَاهُ مِن قَبلُ مِن نارِ السَّمُومِ﴾

*"And We created the jinn before [humans] of a blazing fire."*[3]

**c. Reason, Free Will, and Responsibility:**

Jinn possess reason and free will; therefore, they are *responsible* [*mukallaf*] just like humans. Some are believers, righteous, and the elect of God and others shall be condemned to Hell due to their deviation from the path of righteousness:

> *"And surely among us, some have submitted [to Allah] and others have deviated. Those who have submitted seek rectitude. But as for those who have deviated, they shall be firewood for Hell."*[4]

Various Quranic verses also suggest that God has appointed prophets from among the jinn as well so as to impart divine signs upon them.[5] Another point of correspondence among humans and jinn is that the purpose of both races is *servitude and worship of the One Allah:*

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1- It has been surmised that fire signifies a type of energy that cannot be evaluated using contemporary instruments and that can transmute into matter by concentration. Through this speculation, the fact that the jinn have been seen on occasion can be rationalized.

2- In the story of the conjuration of the throne of the Queen of Sheba [*saba'*], the Quran attests to the fact that one of the jinn, an afreet [ifrīt], in the service of Solomon ('a) declared that he could present her throne, before Solomon ('a) could rise from his seat. (See: *Sūrah Naml* 27:38-39)

3- *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:27.

4- *Sūrah Jinn* 72:14-15.

5- *Sūrah An'ām* 6:130.

﴿وَ ما خَلَقْتُ الجِنَّ و الإِنسَ إِلّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

> *"And I have not created the jinn and humans but that they worship Me."*[1]

**d. Communal Life:**
Various Hadith and Quranic verses indicate that like humans, the jinn live in communities. The Quran states the fact that nations of jinn existed in the past. The word "*ummah*" (nation) is an explicit indicator of the social lives of jinn. Furthermore, the system of marriage and reproduction exists among the jinn as well.

**e. The Relationship of Jinn and Humans:**
Even though the jinn are normally intangible, sometimes a unique liaison is created between various jinn and humans. According to the Quran, various jinn were among the subordinates and soldiers of Solomon ('a).[2] On the other hand, at various points in time, groups of humans worshiped jinn and on occasion, some became subservient minions to jinn.[3]

### 3. Satan [*shaytān*]

A third intangible entity who has been named in our religious texts is *Satan* [*shaytān*] or *Iblis*. Shaytān is sometimes used as a qualifier—meaning wicked and evil. This usage pertains to both humans and jinn:

﴿وَ كَذٰلِكَ جَعَلنا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوّاً شَياطِينَ الإِنسِ وَ الجِنِّ﴾

> *"And thus We appointed for each prophet an enemy—satans of human and jinn."*[4]

In addition, sometimes it is used referring to the object of our discussion.[5] However, the name Iblis is a proper noun and thus, it is not used for other entities except metaphorically, allegorically, or innuendo.

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[1] *Sūrah Ḍārīāt* 51:56.

[2] *Sūrah Naml* 27:17, 27:39; and *Sūrah Saba'* 34:14.

[3] *Sūrah Saba'* 34:41; and *Sūrah An'ām* 6:100, 6:128.

[4] *Sūrah An'ām* 6:112.

[5] In the Quran, Shaytān is used both with the definite article "ال", indicating it as a proper noun and without the definite article, denoting it as a qualifier.

**a. The Nature of Satan:**
The Quran explicitly states that Satan is of the jinn:

﴿فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّآ إِبليسَ كانَ مِنَ الجِنِّ﴾

*"Then they [all] bowed save for Iblis who was of the jinn."*[1]

As a rationale for his transgression against the divine order to bow before Adam ('a), Satan emphasized the fact that he was created from fire whereas Adam ('a) was created from clay. As we have previously stated, the Quran attests to the fact that the essence of jinn is fire.

Nevertheless, religious texts about Satan reveal the fact that before his insurrection, he worshiped God for a very long time. Due to the exuberance of his worship, he entered the order of angels and as a result, God's command to the angels to bow before Adam ('a) included Satan as well.

**b. The History of Satan:**
Satan has a singularly amazing and edifying history that is indicated in various sections of the Quran. Here is a short version of the Quranic story of Satan: At the beginning, due to the profuseness of his worship, Satan was affiliated with the order of angels. After creating Adam ('a), God commanded the angels—including Satan—to prostrate themselves before Adam ('a). However, Satan was too proud to prostrate himself and refused.[2] In order to vindicate himself of this defiance, Satan resorted to a fallacious argument. Due to his fiery essence, Satan considered himself superior to Adam ('a) who was created of clay.[3] This was a great test and Satan failed it in disgrace. Because of this blatant rebellion, Satan fell from his lofty station and he was cast out of the divine court.[4] Thus, Satan was cursed by God until the Day of Judgment.[5] Thereupon, Satan professed his enmity

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1- *Sūrah Kahf* 18:50.
2- *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:28-31.
3- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:12; and *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:33.
4- *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:34.
5- *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:35.

with Adam (‘a) and in order to seduce and corrupt Adam (‘a) and his children, he asked God to respite him until the Resurrection.[1] Consequently, in His divine wisdom, God gave Satan amnesty for a fixed period—the duration of which is unclear to us.[2]

### c. Satan’s Campaign:

Satan employs various methods to corrupt humans. One of these methods is instigating evil whispers [*waswasah*] or suggestions within humans. The Quran attests that by evil whispers [*waswasah*], Satan tempted Adam (‘a) and Eve (‘a) to eat from the forbidden tree and deceived them through perjury.[3] Another of his methods is beautifying and glamorizing evil deeds.[4] Satan illustrates the pleasures of sins more ardently than they truly are so as to trap humans in the snare of vices.

Additionally, Satan makes promises to his followers; promises that shall never be realized.[5] In order to prevent benevolence or charity [*infāq*] he discourages people with the threat of poverty and destitution.[6] He induces humans to forget God.[7] In précis, Satan is humanity’s most significant external motivator of evil and wicked deeds.[8]

It must be noted that none of the seductive and deceptive methods of Satan can overrule free will. In fact, ultimately, humans themselves consent to Satan’s dominance over them. They themselves put on the collar of Satan’s discipleship and say *labbayk*[9] to his call. The Quran depicts a scene from the Hereafter in which Satan addresses the souls of the damned and says:

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[1] *Sūrah A‘rāf* 7:14; and *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:36.

[2] *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:37-38. It is self-evident that Satan’s amnesty and means for temptation is a part of God’s tradition of trialing humans. The existential philosophy of Satan is indicated in *Sūrah Saba’*:

﴿وَ ما كانَ لَهُ عَلَيهِم مِن سلطانٍ إلّا لَنَعلَمَ مَن يُؤمِنُ بالأَخِرَةِ مِمَّن هُوَ مِنها في شَكٍّ﴾

> *“And he [Satan] had no sovereignty over them save that We might differentiate those who believe in the Hereafter from those who doubt it.”* (*Sūrah Saba’* 34:21)

[3] *Sūrah A‘rāf* 7:20-22.

[4] *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:39.

[5] *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* 14:22.

[6] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:268.

[7] *Sūrah An‘ām* 6:68.

[8] *Sūrah Nūr* 24:21.

[9] This means, at your service. [trans.]

﴿وَ ما كانَ لِيَ عَلَيكُم مِن سُلطانٍ إِلّآ أَن دَعَوتُكُم فَاستَجَبتُمْ لي، فَلا تَلومُوني و لومُوٓا أَنفُسَكُم﴾

*"And I had no dominance over you except that I called to you and you answered me; so do not reproach me but reproach yourselves."*[1]

Hence, the existence of Satan and his schemes and tricks do not contradict our free will or responsibilities toward ourselves. We are ultimately accountable for our own actions in the end—no excuses whatsoever.

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1- *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* 14:22.

# Chapter Two

# THE RESURRECTION (ESCHATOLOGY)

Section One: **The Human Essence**
Section Two: **Death**
Section Three: **Philosophical Approaches to Human Immortality**
Section Four: **Life in the Hereafter as stated by the Quran**

# Introduction

All humans in this world are temporal beings whose lives have a beginning and end. Their past reaches oblivion and so does their future. The span between the beginning and end, which is the repository of one's life, is surrounded by nihility. We experience life and existence but we have not experienced oblivion and never shall. Our experiences are restricted to our existence. Thus, we learn from experience that, "No human life is permanent and it has a finish just as it has a start". Even though we have not reached the end of our lives (i.e. death), we realize from the deaths of our fellow humans that there is no escape from this unavoidable juncture. The two points of start and finish draw our attention; two disparate and sensitive phases or rather—two extremities.

People see their inception as a transferal from inexistence to existence and the opposite point as a transferal from existence to inexistence. However, in becoming existent, we traverse an eternally long path—what distance is longer than the gap between nullity and reality?

This apparently impassable distance brings up various questions. Such as, how is our genesis possible? Where have we come from? Who is our originator? We cannot find the efficient cause for our existence and continuity either in ourselves or in the beings around us. The intellect drives us to seek the entity that has invited us into existence—an entity to which the whole world is indebted for their existence; an entity who is sufficient of all others and who is untainted by any restrictions and conditions.

Endeavoring to understand and contemplate our end makes the question of our origination more sensitive and important, and it suffuses every moment of our lives. The Master of the World has made all beings in existence His guests; He maintains this feast, and has made humans exempt from facing oblivion. This end has confronted us with oblivion and the span between existence and inexistence. It has made us aware that not only are we needy in our genesis, we are also needy in our continuation. We humans believe that the gap between existence and nonexistence is miniscule. However, coming into existence out of the void is a miracle that has removed humanity's genesis from the restrictions of nature.

On the other hand, the eventide of our existence, as opposed to our dawning, is a terrifying and macabre juncture. We humans live and relish our lives and existences. We have tasted of the exotic drink of existence and thus, all our endeavors are based on preserving it. We guard our existence against anything that will bring about our ends. Our aspiration is to eradicate exterminative factors and their symptoms (such as weakness and frailty). We dream of finding the elixir of life. We aim at the ideal of freedom from the constricted and impenetrable prison of time. We wish that our past and future sorrows would not hurt us. We abhor this final juncture, thus, we ask ourselves:

Is there a way to cheat death? Will I continue to exist after death? Moreover, if I am not obliterated after death, where shall I be and where shall I go from there?

These questions confront the human identity. Hence, thoughtful people cannot disregard such questions and cannot delude themselves into believing that they are exaggerated. This essential quality has released these questions from historic and geographic boundaries. Archeological and anthropological studies have attested to the fact that understanding our beginning and end has always been a universal issue. For instance, the relics of ancient graves and primitive customs regarding the method of interment of the dead are telltales of their particular beliefs about life after death and the state of the dead.[1]

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[1] In their findings from primitive peoples, researchers have encountered issues that reveal various types of beliefs in life after death; regardless of whether these beliefs are superstitious or not. For example, they state that primitive humans have devised plans in order to ease the transportation of the dead that have various forms all over the world. For instance, they would cover the dead with heaps of stones, or they would tie their dead with strong ropes. In some places, they would even impale their dead into the ground with sharp poles through their chests. Moreover, mummifying the dead; placing pictures, icons, and food in graves; burying the friends and family of the deceased in its grave; etc. were various ancient customs that reveal early humans beliefs. For more information, see: Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*,

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Modern humans also seek answers to these questions in both their personal lives and scientific and philosophic studies.

Whenever a question agitates the sea of our intellect, our mind's ambition is to reach the truth even though in this context the obscure truth of creation is not easily discerned. The deeper a question penetrates into the profundity of existence, the harder it is to determine its answer. Existence is profound, complex, involute, exquisite, and tenacious. Thus, even discovering all facets of its most apparent layer has no end. We must have perceptive eyes and acute ears and think straight. All fantasies regarding existence will be repelled some day. Even though it may be hard, we must understand the language of existence. The world is not mute. It speaks and does not allow any utterance to be forced upon it.

Due to various mental-spiritual reasons, in order to answer their complex questions, many people seek refuge in delusive thoughts and fabricate beliefs by fantasizing and making groundless suppositions. Sometimes these superstitious beliefs turn into incontrovertible and dogmatic beliefs in future generations due to the predominance of followership mentalities. Thus, these beliefs dominate the minds and souls of a people for centuries. Doubtless, many weak and superstitious beliefs about death and the afterlife are thus originated.

### In Quest for an Answer

Two repositories of knowledge open the path for human understanding:

### 1. The Results of Scientific Research and Investigation:

In modern day, we divide this repository into *science* and *philosophy*. Science comprises empirical knowledge or knowledge based on inductive syllogism and philosophy comprises non-empirical knowledge or knowledge based on intellective syllogism. The common attribute of these two divisions is that the scientist or philosopher endeavors to arrange and prove a hypothesis according to logical principles. Whether its accordance with actuality is proven or its fallaciousness is revealed, both have a great part in human

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vol. 1, pp. 49, 155, 180, 283, 429, 851, 925; vol. 2, p. 18; vol. 3, p. 9; and Nass, John B., *The Comprehensive History of Religions*.

knowledge. The caravan of human knowledge has traversed many treacherous and unpredictable paths in order to reach its contemporary state while accelerating every moment. However, our lack of knowledge is indubitably incomparable with our knowledge.

Obviously, in order to attain stable and trustworthy knowledge regarding life after death, we cannot utilize empirical knowledge. Even if science can successfully present a natural explanation of life and death, it cannot reveal knowledge of the state of death and the dead. This is because, empirical knowledge relates to perceptible and repeatable phenomena and it is mute regarding other phenomena. Those who have gone are silent and those extant are unaware of these tidings.

Various thinkers have attempted to answer questions regarding our finale using their intellectual findings and rational contemplation of humanity and the cosmos. Varieties of philosophical schools have presented diverse theories on this issue. However, these theories are typically general and can at most prove the continuation of individuals. The intellect cannot depict postmortal spiritual incidents or even the experience of death. In order to advance in this field the intellect has fixed its eyes upon a different source. This source must present the intellect with conceptual and factual intuitional elements so it can begin its progress in this field.

### 2. Revelation:

Revelation is knowledge that has been given to humanity freely and that is not a result of human toil. Thus, it does not have the limitations and flaws of human knowledge. This cascading fount of knowledge has set forth the main lines for all exterior and interior discoveries regarding existence and has presented a solid image of the whole truth or, in other words, *the big picture*. Without this knowledge, humans can neither truly understand their current state nor their continued existence. Divine prophets and messengers have bestowed this vital knowledge upon humanity. They are the first to whisper the song of eternality in our ears. They have reminded us that the thirst for everlastingness is a true thirst and can only be quenched with the elixir of eternal life.

The prophets have illustrated our beginning and end, and our fall and ascension. They have engraved absolute perpetuity and immortality in our minds. Knowledge of our origin and destination is an element of guidance that may only be found in the teachings of divine prophets. The result of this knowledge is true self-awareness; it is never falling astray in the world; it is precise awareness of one's path and destination. Prophets are experienced voyagers who warn travelers of the dangers and deviations of the path and guide them to the depths of existence. We humans may learn endless knowledge and wisdom from the prophets. With the aid of these immaculate souls, we may purify all aspects of our existence and attain perfection.

In exchange for these blessings, all they ask for is *faith*. The messengers of God ('a) bestow something upon humans that they can never attain on their own and all they ask for in return is what logically entails from their enjoinment. Faith [*īmān*] is a process in which all human systems—such as the system of knowledge or emotions—participate. Faith in our origin is faith in prophethood, and faith in our destination is faith in returning to our origin. Faith in the Prophet (ṣ) is faith in God and faith in God and the prophet is faith in life in the Hereafter. Denying the Resurrection and life after death is denying our origin, both of which are denying prophethood. By disseminating divine messages, the prophets show us our true station and shed us of the stain of negligence towards God and ourselves. By aiding our intellect, they purify our worldly lives. They increase our passion for righteousness and free us of despair, fear, and anxiety; thus, they swiftly guide us to the harborage of tranquility. They present us with the past and future of existence and from within nature, they make us a guest of the supernatural. These experienced voyagers reveal the essence of natural phenomena through their divine identities. In other words, prophets tear the veils between nature and the extramundane. Thus, the paths between the heavens and earth are opened and earthly humans can perceive the supernatural just as they see nature.

The teachers of logic and certitude and the deniers of blind advocacy present their enjoinment such that it leaves no intellectual justification for doubt or refutation, unless mental states or psychological conditions interfere to simulate inner doubt.

Revelation has specific attributes that differentiate it from the first source of knowledge (human knowledge):

1. Freedom from all errors and faults
2. Benefiting from the divine fountainhead of absolute knowledge and the prophets' needlessness of methods of knowledge acquisition that have the possibility of fault
3. Dependency of these teachings upon objective scientific arguments

The Noble Quran and the compendium of the teachings of the Prophet (ṣ) and the Immaculate Imams ('a) have provided us with a valuable treasury of truths regarding death and life in the Hereafter. Researchers must have the same attitude towards revelational and religious statements as they have towards all other aspects of existence. These descriptive revelational statements explain reality and accurately report the past, present, and future of existence. Thus, any researcher who knows the laws of apprehending and discovering truths can theorize regarding religious statements, including statements about death and immortality, and attempt to prove their theories. Interpretation and elucidation of religious propositions and concepts is a scientific endeavor. In scientific research, we must prevent influence of personal and psychological conditions that separate us from the path of truth. This is not easy, but it is possible. We must not forget that we humans are subject to errors and the probability of these errors is high. However, we must not let this discourage us; rather, we must increase our resolve and precision. Therefore, even though this second source is complete and infallible, our scientific knowledge is progressive (not absolute) and sometimes erroneous. Our cognitive system acknowledges its limitations; however, it does not tolerate a standstill.

Reliance upon revelation does not mean that the intellect is faulty and must be put aside; rather, correct understanding of revelational concepts requires reason. We mean to say that without the aid of revelation and by utilizing only reason, one cannot fathom life in the Hereafter. Even with the guidance of religion, reason cannot answer all its questions at once. Thus, many illuminated philosophers—while they have been successful in philosophical research about various issues regarding death and life in the Hereafter—have found themselves at an impasse regarding other philosophic issues on this subject. As a result, they have sufficed themselves with faith in the concepts and teachings in the Quran and Hadith[1] or have organized their philosophic theories with inspiration from divine revelation.[2] It must be reminded that the path of discovery of truth, like all human affairs, is progressive.

عقل، چون جبریل گوید احمدا
گر یکی گامی نهم سوزد مرا
تو مرا بگذار زین پس پیشران
حدّ من این بود ای سلطان جان

*As Gabriel says O Ahmad, reason;*
*Burns me if I (revelation) take a step.*
*Hence, set me as the navigator;*
*This is my station O leader of hearts (reason).* [3]

## Eschatology and Anthropology

Since death and life in the Hereafter deal with human states, understanding humans and humanity has a direct effect in eschatological discussions. To state the matter differently, we must first harmonize our opinions on immortality with our views regarding the nature of humankind. Therefore, anthropology is an important prerequisite of eschatology. Accordingly, it is befitting that we first take a glance at several important anthropological principles that have a close link with immortality. Then, we shall commence the discussion on death and eternality.

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[1] Ibn-e Sīnā (Avicenna), *Ilāhiyāt-e Shifā' (Healing, Theology)*, disquisition 9, chap. 7.

[2] Mullāsadrā, *Asfār (Journeys)*, vol. 9, p. 179.

[3] Jalal ad-Din Maūlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spiritual Couplets)*, Book I, verses 1069-1070.

# Section One

## The Human Essence

As far as the history of human knowledge shows, we humans have continuously endeavored to discover our station in the world and our relationship with other creatures. These endeavors were obstructed at the very beginning of history and today, this obstruction has not been relieved even in advanced scientific communities. Humanity's existence is not analogous to the existence of other natural entities. It seems that among the discovered creatures in nature, we humans are unique and that our existence is not in concord with the image of the natural world. The existence of humans in this collection has made it difficult to explain and elucidate this structure overall. Experts in natural science tell us that the world is made up of chaotic and mindless physical particles. However, we perceive ourselves as purposeful and intellectual creatures. How can a creature with awareness come about in a world full of mindless particles? How can the mechanical world produce an entity that can present itself unto the world? How can we conceive of an essentially purposeless world that nurtures beings with transcendent purposes? How can a being with free will emerge from a world that according to determinism has foreshadowed its elements? Yea, human qualities and attributes have resulted in these questions and have made the coordination of humans and other natural beings challenging.

According to common belief, human qualities reside in two general vessels: body and soul. Languages attest to the existence of this common belief. There are two types of concepts in all languages. Consequently, we are faced with two classes of statements that possess a common subject (humans) with the variation of the predicate. For instance, regard these two statements:

1. Mary is 90 pounds.
2. Mary hopes to attend college.

One class of statements, like the first, describes the states and conditions of the human body. Even though the predicate of this type of statement relates to the human body, it is usually common with other corporeal beings, such as predicates that indicate weight, shape, or size. In contrast, other statements, such as the second sentence, sometimes mostly and sometimes absolutely pertain to humans and do not indicate bodily statuses. These predicates encompass thought, reasoning, deduction, love, intimacy, faith, etc. As a result, in studying humans, we are faced with two sets of qualities:

- Material or corporeal attributes such as heat, size, color, weight, etc.
- Incorporeal or spiritual attributes such as fear, love, courage, aspiration, hope, etc.

These two classes are essentially different. For example, the attributes in the first class are obvious and can be perceived with the senses. However, the attributes of the second class, such as sorrow, belief, fear, impatience, etc. are not such. The first type of states can be perceived by everyone; yet, the second type can only be cognized by the person experiencing them. Each individual's intentions are clear to themselves but obscure to others. No one can hide their height or width, nevertheless intentions, sorrow, and happiness can be concealed.

Additionally, the manner in which an individual realizes each of these qualities is not the same. For example, we can feel pain without any intermediates. Therefore, if someone asks us, "How do you know you have pain?", we would deem the question irrational. However, becoming aware of a physical disorder such as a gastric ulcer requires reasoning. Consequently, if someone asks, "How do you know that you have an ulcer?", we would have to present our reasons, which may be the physician's diagnosis. Therefore, at least the three factors of spatiality, general exposure, and indirect accessibility dissociate corporeal qualities from spiritual qualities.

The public, scientists, and philosophers all agree on this matter. Everyone concurs with the duality of all languages regarding humans, which indicates duality in humanity's attributes and characteristics. Here, the question exists: Are these two classes based on one essential aspect or two disparate essential aspects that, while linked, are independent of one other and can be intellectually separated? Advocates of the first theory are called *monists* and supporters of the second theory are called *dichotomists* or *dualists.*[1]

The first view states that the first-class attributes—that describe the human body—are fundamental human attributes and each of the second-class attributes depend upon the quality of the first class.

Consequently, second-class attributes cannot exist without first-class attributes. For example, "hope" is a function of specific states within the human body, especially the brain and the nervous system. Thus, we do not possess two distinct and independent aspects; rather, humans are similar to machines comprised of cellular blocks and have two distinct classes of attributes. However, they both, directly or indirectly, pertain to the human body such that visualizing a person without a standard body is visualizing the inexistence of that person.

Advocates of the second view however, have discovered these attributes so inherently different that they have attributed the first class to the body and the second class to another entity called soul. Some have even stressed that the soul equates with the human identity. Even though these two entities are linked in a mysterious and mystical manner and they create a single human identity in this world, one can imagine them existing apart from each other. It is worthy of note that the issue of the intercommunication of the body and soul—according to this view—or mental states—according to the first view—has been problematic throughout history.

## Duality of Humans and Our Rationale

Advocates of the second view maintain that our introversive contemplations attest to this duality. Each of us discovers a truth within ourselves separate of our body, which we call "self". This "self" signifies our essence as opposed to our bodies; it is not identifiable with our bodies. This averment includes various rationales some of which are enumerated below.

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1- These are the major theories regarding the human constitution. However, there are minority theories regarding the nature of the person, such as *trichotomism*, which states that humans are made up of three distinct components: body, soul, and spirit. [trans.]

i. In every person, there exist actions and manifestations that cannot be rendered as pertaining to the body. The body cannot manage these phenomena; however, they must have an originator. Since the body cannot be considered the author of these occurrences, they must be predicated by another entity. We call this entity the soul. Intuitive perception, thought, analysis, judgment, religious experience, emotions, and sentiments are a number of phenomena that signify the existence of the soul.

ii. Contrary to other creatures in existence, human actions do not occur according to a standard routine. Human actions are not similar in identical situations. This makes it almost impossible to predict human behavior. Discovering the laws governing human behavior is not like discovering the laws governing natural objects. This rationale is indicative of the element of free will. Explaining and interpreting free will based on mechanical determinist laws of nature is not possible.

iii. We relate all our internal and external actions to our "self". We say, "I walk", "I see", "I think", etc. Since there in no organ in the body to which we may attribute all our actions, it is revealed that there is a distinct aspect to humans that is transcendent to the body and that holds the status of originator of all actions. In addition, we can say regarding the body and its parts, "my hand=hand belonging to the self", "my heart=heart belonging to the self", etc. We can clearly perceive an "otherness" between the noun (i.e. hand, heart, etc.) and the pronoun (i.e. my). Because this apprehension is intuitive and thus infallible, it is conclusive evidence that we have a dual constitution.[1]

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1- One might say that in normal speech we use terms such as "my essence=essence belonging to the self" or "myself=self belonging to the self". We must bear in mind that in these cases, we do not intuitively apprehend discord or otherness between the possessive and noun; and with little thought, we realize that these two are in fact, one and the same.

iv. Moreover, in differentiation of natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, scientific philosophers stress issues that indicate the duality of the human constitution. The following issues have resulted in the natural sciences overshadowing the liberal arts:

  a. Existence of free will in humans and the superfluity of causality and determinism in virtue of this factor
  b. The purposefulness of humanity
  c. The significance of human actions

### Incorporeality of the Soul

Our previous rationales indicate that those who advocate the existence of the soul both stress the identification of self with the soul and its incorporeality. An incorporeal entity is an entity that transcends material attributes such as volume, mass, direction, shape, size, location, time, etc. After proving the disparity of the body and soul, Islamic researchers have brought various arguments for the incorporeality of the soul. Here, we shall briefly discuss these arguments.

One of the properties of corporeal entities is their divisibility. Scientifically, all material objects can be divided into smaller parts, even though this may be unfeasible in practice. On the other hand, we distinctly realize that dividing "self" into two or more constituents in meaningless and impossible. Thus, the human soul is not a material and divisible object.

Moreover, human capacities, such as our capacity for knowledge, are inexhaustible, but unlimited affairs cannot be explained in terms of the human body.

The modern science of parapsychology speaks of mental phenomena that support existence of the soul. These phenomena are divided into two groups:

1. Phenomena that do not necessitate life after death, but are credible evidence of the incorporeality of humans: These include psychokinesis (PK) and extrasensory perception (ESP) in its various forms, such as telepathy and clairvoyance.

2. Phenomena that are related to life after death: These include communication with the dead by means of mediums, revival of the dead, and out-of-body experiences.

In telepathy, the thoughts in one person's mind are transferred to the mind of another without using normal channels of communication under conditions that cannot be regarded as chance, such as mental communication over vast distances through steel shields. Clairvoyance is the knowledge of objects and affairs without the intermediacy of sensory organs and without physical contact of the clairvoyant with the perceived object. Psychokinesis is the ability to move objects by mental effort without using physical devices.[1]

In short, these affairs, which are called paranormal phenomena, attribute abilities to humans that cannot be explained in terms of the physical framework, from subatomic and submolecular approaches to neurological and physiological approaches.

Below is a summary of the theories about the human nature as regards the issue of immortality:

1. The human being is an indissoluble unity and its entire existence is limited to its corporeal frame. The monotheist advocates of this theory believe in the existence and perpetuity of humans after death in a future age.
2. Humans have a dual constitution with disparate and heterogeneous qualities. Most supporters of human immortality advocate this theory, although, they are divided into two groups:
    a. Those who believe in the duality of the human nature, however, because they identify humans with their souls, they understand that only the spiritual aspect is immortal.
    b. Those who regard the identity of humans as the sum of their body and soul; therefore, they regard humans as a spiritual-corporeal entity in all aspects of existence.

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1- For more information, see: John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*.

## Aspects of Human Existence in the Quran

﴿ثم جعلناه نطفة في قرار مكين. ثم خلقنا النطفة علقة فخلقنا العلقة مضغة فخلقنا المضغة عظاما فكسونا العظام لحما ثم انشأناه خلقا اخر فتبارك الله احسن الخالقين﴾

*"Then We made it a sperm in a secure receptacle (womb). Then of the sperm We created blood-clot, next of the blood-clot We created tissue, and then of the tissue We created bones, afterwards We covered the bones with flesh, and then We originated within it a different existence. Glory be to Allah, the fairest of creators."*[1]

﴿ثمّ سوّاه و نَفَخَ فيه من روحِهِ و جعل لكم السمع و الابصار و الافئدة﴾

*"Then He shaped it and breathed in it of His spirit and He appointed for you ears, eyes, and hearts."*[2]

﴿و يسئلونك عن الروح قل الروح من امر ربي و ما اوتيتم من العلم إلا قليلاً﴾

*"And they ask you about the soul; say, 'The soul is my Lord's Command and you have not been given knowledge save a little.'"*[3]

﴿ألا له الخلق و الامر﴾

*"Know that Creation and Command solely belong to Him."*[4]

﴿انّما امره اذا اراد شيئاً ان يقول له كن فيكون﴾

*"His Command is such, when He wants something, the moment He says to it, 'be' it immediately is."*[5]

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1- *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:13-14.
2- *Sūrah Sajdah* 32:9.
3- *Sūrah Isrā'* 17:85.
4- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:54.
5- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:82.

## Commentary and Interpretation

As can be seen, the first verse previously mentioned contains terms that signify the corporeal structure of humans and its origination. The stages of development of the body are distributed through a determined time span. In each stage, the simpler form slowly evolves into a more complex anatomy. The stages of embryo and fetus growth are identified as sperm/zygote [*nuṭfah*], blood-clot [*'alaqah*], tissue [*muḍghah*], bone [*'iẓām*], and flesh/muscle [*laḥm*]. These stages encompass the introduction of the sperm into the uterus throughout the emergence of the human limbs. From beginning to end, this body feeds from nature, develops within it, and ultimately returns to it.

The term "سوّاه" [*sawwāhu*] in the second verse indicates the period of anatomical formation. At the end of this period, as it is also indicated at the conclusion of the first verse, something occurs that is essentially different from the previous stages. Here the Quran speaks of a "different existence" in contrast to the previous gradual stages. In order to describe this stage, the verb "أنشأ" [*ansha'a*] was used.

According to the second verse, the "originated" being is the soul [*rūḥ*] that is firmly established in the body by the "divine breath". We cannot say that the soul is breathed into the body from the outside; however, it is evident that the origination of the soul is inherently different from preceding occurrences. Henceforth, the body is charged with an abode of the soul. Prior to the establishment of the soul, this body had eyes, but did not see; it had ears, but did not hear; it had a form but no content. The body was matter therefore possessed the qualities of matter. Yet now, this matter has been transferred to a different level, that is, adorned with qualities such as awareness, life, knowledge, volition, etc.

We can only see the body; therefore, the question is, "What kind of creature is this esoteric and imperceptible entity?" This question is answered by the third verse, which identifies the soul as the Lord's Command [*amr*].

The second verse, in a manner, attributes the soul to God; while the third verse clarifies that this attribution means that the soul is God's Command. However, what does "Command" mean? The fourth verse provides the answer. God identifies some of His creatures as "Creation" and some as "Command". Thus, in a manner of speaking, there are two extant worlds: *the world of Creation* and *the world of Command*. Usually, the Quran identifies these worlds as the Manifest world and the Invisible world. The Invisible world is the world that cannot be perceived by the senses and is considered the spiritual or inner world [*ālam-e baṭin*], whereas the Manifest world is discernible and apparent. Humans partake of both worlds; they are the conjunction of the natural and supernatural or the Manifest and Invisible planes. The human soul is an entity of Command and has no kinship with the corporeal world, while the human body has developed in the context of nature.

Yea, humans have both form [*ẓāhir*] and essence [*bāṭin*], both eyes and perception, both brain and mind since they have both body and soul. The human body is discernible to all; however, its soul is hidden to all but itself. The soul is the individual's sanctum. It is so profound that at times, its depths are obscure even to the self and thus must be discovered. The body is alive, energetic, and animated as long as its soul is its confidant. When the soul, which was established within the body by the Divine Breath, is recalled by the draw and summons of the Lord, the body submits to silence.

The fifth verse reveals that entities of Command—such as the soul—transcend time, space, and gradual conditions, and that they occur at the behest of the Divine.[1]

In short, we explained that:

- According to the Quran, humans are the integration of body and soul
- The soul is incorporeal since it belongs to the world of Command

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[1] For more information refer to Allāmah Ṭabāṭabāī, *Tafsīr-e Al-Mīzān (Al-Mīzān Exegesis)*, vol. 13, pp. 196-198; and Allāmah Ṭabāṭabāī, *Rasā'il-e Tawḥīdī (Monotheistic Disquisitions)*, Disquisition of Humans before this World, pp. 169-170.

## Section Two

# Death

Humans are death-aware creatures; we know in advance that our current lives are unstable and ephemeral. We realize that terminating factors numerous and our lives are so fragile that it is miraculous that we linger in existence. While we observe life with the depths of our being, a small part of us also looks ahead to death. Our lives are worthwhile only if our deaths are worthwhile. We are immortality-loving creatures; however, we cannot attain unity and tranquility except through death. Yea, life and death must coexist in order for them both to have significance. We realize that life and death are not under our control. Before we can take full advantage of the buffet that life has set before us, we are faced with the heralds of death—weakness and frailty. This infirmity increases every moment and saps our strength and vitality, but it does not decrease our thirst for life. Our dream is neither life with a finale nor life intermingled with death; we desire eternal life. There is no death in eternal life and an eternal human is one whose life surges from within and who is not shadowed by the notion of death. This is not possible save with the promise of life. Death guides us to the Life-provider, and true eternality can only be realized through this union.

### Nature of Death

The issue of death can be studied through philosophical, psychological, and biological approaches. Due to the variety of these approaches, there are numerous interpretations of death. Whatever the nature of death may be, that which is certain is that it is contingent upon on the nature of life. If human life is interpreted in terms of biology, its death must also be interpreted through biology. If we regard life philosophically, such that life is predicated on the supernatural, so also is death. There is no contradiction between these various perspectives since each deals with the means, causes, and purposes of its respective field, and assesses and interprets phenomena within this framework.

As a consequence of these varying perspectives regarding human nature, our philosophic endeavors have resulted in varied expositions of death. The following are several of these views:

1. Those that identify humans with the material body and regard the human individual equatable and restricted to the corporeal frame view death as the termination of life. This is because humans have no *other* reality that can protect them from deterioration and extermination. Death of the body equates with extinguishment of the individual. Death of the body truly severs off the thread of the person's existence. The question of whether or not the person shall later return to life is a separate issue that will be discussed later. In short, this perspective states that death is the termination of the human existence.

2. Some dualists believe that the body does not consist of the essence of the individual and that the human consciousness pertains to the soul. According to this viewpoint, death is not the end of the individual's life. Some advocates of this view believe that the soul is trapped within the body and that death is nothing but freedom from corporeal restrictions. During every moment of the soul's captivity, the body presents it with additional troubles. It continuously demands food, water, and other necessities and exploits the abilities of the self to satisfy its needs. Natural death ends this incarceration and returns the soul to its true station.[1]

3. Those who believe that the individual is a synthesis of body and soul regard death as the separation of the soul's intellectual link with its natural body and the world. Thereafter, it persists in union with a different body free of material qualities.

The common factors of the two prior theories are that human life is not discontinued at the time of death and that death is regarded as a transition from one existential state to another. Some advocates of the third view interpret death as follows:

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1- See: *Plato: Complete Works, Phaedrus (Phaedon).*

Contingent beings are divided into incorporeal beings and material beings or rather, perfect entities and imperfect entities. Incorporeal entities are not characterized with movement and change, and they perpetuate exclusively through the maintenance of their efficient cause. However, material beings or beings that are linked with materiality essentially evolve, change, and strive towards their purpose. Because we are a part of the natural world, we too are evolving beings. Our development has an end and by arriving at it, we reach our deaths. Our end is not a place external to ourselves that we can reach by making effort; rather, it is like maturity for an adolescent. Maturity is not external to the adolescent's being; the adolescent gradually develops towards maturity. In other worlds, the human aim is evolution from absolute materiality towards incorporeality and the supernatural plane. Our life in the natural world is the span of this evolution. When we humans adequately develop our capacities through worldly life, we are ready to elevate to a higher plane where our material bodies are not necessary. Thus, we end our journey in this world by leaving behind our corporeal form.

An example that can better formulate this perspective in the mind is that for the duration that humans exist as a fetus, they continually evolve from faultiness towards perfection and the course and distance of this evolution is the time spent in the womb. During this transition, the fetus needs and belongs to the uterus; such that if for any reason its evolution terminates before reaching its perfection, it remains premature and faulty. However, when its course is fully traversed, it must be delivered outside the abdomen and birth is vital. At this point, the existence of the former fetus is so altered that it no longer requires its embryonic receptacle.[1]

Consequently, it must be understood that death is not the annihilation and extinction of human individuals; rather, it is a transition from one existential plane to the next or in other words, it is the evolution of human beings from faultiness to a certain level of perfection.

This interpretation of the nature of death reveals it as a part of humanity's existence. In fact, death is an upholder of our existence not its eliminator. More precisely, we humans die and come to life every moment, in the sense that we cross over from our previous states to reach new ones. The condition for reaching the next state is traversing our previous more flawed state. Hence, death shall expire in the world of perfection and perpetuity where our actions shall become manifest.

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[1] Mullāṣadrā, *Asfār (Journeys)*, vol. 8, pp. 105, 106.

Jalāl ad-Dīn Mawlavī has versified this interpretation using a beautiful analogy:

> *This world is like a tree, O Bountiful;*
> *And we, like green fruit.*
> *The unripe hold fast to the branch*
> *For in their immaturity, they not suitable for a palace.*
> *When they ripen and become lip-stingingly sweet;*
> *Their hold on the branch weakens.*
> *When a mouth is sweetened by its fate;*
> *To the person, the world becomes cold.*[1]

**Death as stated by the Quran and Hadith**

﴿الله يتوف الانفس حين موتها و التي لم تمت في منامها فيمسك التي قضى عليها الموت و يرسل الاخرى الى اجل مسمى﴾

> *"Allah completely retracts souls at the time of their deaths and also retracts those that have not died, while they sleep. So, He holds souls upon which He has decreed death and returns the rest until an appointed end."*[2]

In this verse, death is represented with the term *tawaffa an-nafs* (complete retraction of the soul). *Tawaffā* happens at death and in sleep. During each phenomenon the soul's connection with the body—and thus the natural world—is severed is some way. During each phenomenon, the soul is withdrawn; however, one is temporary and partial and the other is permanent and complete. At the moment of death, our essence or soul, which is the body's sustaining agent, is completely retracted. Thus, the soul completely abandons the natural world and enters an invisible quarter of existence. Sleep provides us with a muted perception of the experience of death. As long as the soul is linked to the corporeal body, it may remain asleep; but if this link is severed, death occurs. As a result, death is not annihilation; rather, it is the launch of a new state of human existence, different from life in this world. Consequently, the soul discards its corporeal body, which belongs to the natural world.

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[1] Jalal ad-Din Mawlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spititual Couplets)*, Book III, verses 1293-1296.

[2] *Sūrah Zumar* 39:42.

﴿الى ربّك يومئذ المساق﴾

*"That is the day of propelling towards your Lord."*[1]

This type of verse indicates a deeper facet of death. The day of death is the day of return to God. God is the master of existence and whatever enters His presence is protected from inexistence. At the Lord's command, the soul leaves the natural world at the time of death and enters an alternate world, which is its original residence and exempt from time and space. Death shreds all veils and reveals to us the reality of existence. Even though we might not have volitionally observed this reality in life, in death we are compelled to notice all truths.

Accordingly, death is a passageway on which we travel from one facet of existence (the Manifest) to the other (the Invisible). On one side it is an exit and on the other it is an entrance. Imām 'Alī ('a) has stated:

> "So, surely the world has not been created for you as a place of permanent stay; rather, it has been created for you as a passageway so that you send forth your actions as provisions for the abode of permanence."[2]

﴿ما كان لنفس ان تموت الا باذن الله كتابا مؤجلا...﴾

*"No soul dies save by the leave of Allah, at an appointed time."*[3]

Death, like life, occurs by the hand of God. No person comes to life by their own efforts and no one retrieves their own soul. The agent that gives and takes life is not the self because life and death are not volitional phenomena.

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[1] *Sūrah Qiyāmah* 75:30.

[2] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, Sermon 132.

[3] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:145.

The soul cannot pass into the next world until an appointed time, just as it could not enter this world at will.

﴿كل نفس ذائقة الموت﴾

*"All souls shall taste death."*[1]

The general law of death has no exceptions. Immortality in this world is nothing but a dream—nature cannot endlessly sustain the human individual. In order to overcome a law of nature one must make use of an alternate natural law. There is no law in nature that can prevail against the law of death. Humanity cannot violate the laws of nature. All we can do is to resort to a different natural law through scientific endeavors. However, there is no law in nature that can free us of death. This is because death is one of our existential conditions—it is not exterior to our nature. Therefore, we cannot create in an impregnable fortress against death in which to hide. Death is a reality that emanates from our beings; thus, escape from death can only result in a checkmate.

﴿اينما تكونوا يدرككم الموت و لو كنتم في بروج مشيّدة﴾

*"Wherever you may be, death will find you; though you be in secure towers."*[2]

**Fear of Death**

Fear is one of the most common feelings that dominate us. It is an experience that no person enjoys; one that everyone attempts to circumvent. Due to its variable sources, the nature of this phenomenon is not constant, even though we indicate it with a single term. Fear of poverty, fear of disease, fear of loosing one's reputation, fear of other people, fear of disasters and natural phenomena, etc. each have their own conditions and effects. However, among the various factors that cause terror and dread, none is more dreadful than death. The mention of death quivers hearts and turns pleasure to mourning. Nowadays, many intellectuals have abandoned study of the reality of death due to inability to gather empirical data and have therefore inclined towards study of the psychological and physiological aspects of death instead. They endeavor to present us with methods of delaying or prevailing over death. Some common ideas regarding fear of death include:

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[1] *Sūrah Āli 'Imrān* 3:185.

[2] *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:78.

1. Death alters life into oblivion.
2. Even though death is inevitable, its time is unspecified. Thus, we are continually fearful and distraught regarding death.
3. Death is an unidentified phenomenon and we have no experience regarding it. In fact, it seems that death is the end of experiences. Thus, we do not know what happens to us at that moment, and if we have continuity, what will happen after it.
4. Each person has to face death alone. If we could experience it with others, it would not be so fearsome and horrendous.
5. By reaching death, all our hopes and wishes are lost and thus, we are severed from all our desires.

There is a great gap between those who support individual immortality to overcome their fear of death and those who seek to alleviate this fear by regarding humans mortally perishable and introducing death as the finale of the individual's existence. Socrates is of the first group:

> "A man who has grown grey in the love of wisdom must be cheerful at the approach of death, because he can promise himself the greatest happiness after it… If this is the case, what an absurdity would it be if he, who points all his efforts here on earth at one single object, were to feel affliction, when the long-wished-for aim was at last accomplished."[1]

However, materialists such as *Epicurus* attempt to banish fear of death by denying life after death and introducing death as the termination of awareness and absolute painlessness. These ideologists neglect the fact that our fear of death is not because we regard it painful; rather, it is love for life that makes the taste of death bitter to our tongues. How can one soothe people by declaring that death is the end of their lives? Regarding fear of death, *Spinoza* states:

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1- *Plato: Complete Works, Phaedrus (Phaedon).*

> "A free man thinks of death least of all things; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life."[1]

This statement signifies that humans can alleviate fear of death merely by not thinking about it. Spinoza neglects that remembrance and fear of death is not a volitional feeling that one can evade. To say, "do not think of death" is not enough. It has to be explained *how* one can *not* think of death and whether not thinking about death is truly wise or ideal.

### Religion and Fear of Death

One of the ethical aims of religion is purifying our being of all internal conflicts and saving us from bitter and costly psychological experiences such as grief, fear, and anxiety. Religious education evolves us existentially by propelling us, and all our aspects and states, toward our Creator whereby transforming all our interactive states. For example, a believer in God fears Him. However, this fear is essentially different from fear of beings other than God. God is an entity that the faithful are fearful of in their hearts; even so, they still seek refuge with Him. Besides God, nothing can simultaneously be an agent of fear and an agent of security and trust. If fear of anything except God penetrates into one's soul, it will continuously grow and ultimately imbue one's being. However, fear of God sears the roots of all fears within one's being. Hence, fear of God is a human perfection and fear of created things is a fault. Courageous persons are those who fear nothing besides God while the memory of God imbues their hearts with humility, modesty, and fear—a fear that suffuses them with felicity and joy.

> *Lā takhāfū*[2] *is the offering of the fearful;*
> *It is worthy of those who are fearful of Him.*
> *Whoever fears is made safe and secure;*
> *Thus, all quaking hearts are made calm.*
> *Those who shed their fear when it is said: 'Fear not!'*
> *Whether you teach them or not, they need no lesson.*[3]

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[1] Spinoza, *Ethics*, prop. LXVII.

[2] *Lā takhāfū,* which means '*fear not*', is a phrase from the Quran. [trans.]

[3] Jalal ad-Din Mawlavī, *Mathavī-e Ma'navī*, Book I, verses 1432-1434.

Therefore, the only solution for fear is based on the main pillar of Islam, which is *Tawḥīd* or belief in the One God. No one can escape the fear of death, nor can they convey themselves from a state of unrest to the harborage of tranquility, save by having faith in God and surrendering to Him. This is why religion does not ask that we forget death; rather, it constantly asks us to contemplate death and remember always the boundaries of our current lives. It does not tolerate neglect of this fact and regards this negligence a cause of squandering the opportunities of life. Islam teaches us to live objectively. It describes the stages of life and encourages us to recognize them all. Ultimately, Islam fashions humans into loving beings, not fearful ones because it interprets death as the point of acceleration towards our Creator and the encounter of the limited with the Infinite.

The main lines that divine religions present for confronting fear of death are briefly described below:

1. Divine religions introduce humans as immortal and eternal beings and regard the desire for eternality rational and with cause. Fear of death cannot be eradicated by regarding death as complete annihilation and nihility of the self because our love of perpetuance is incompatible with this approach. It causes internal conflict within the human soul and adds to our pain instead of relieving it. While revering life, divine religions remind us that this world is transitory and that a person who regards death as the end becomes dominated by intense attachment to this world and fear of death. This sort of person unduly lauds this ephemeral life. Religious teachings emphasize the negligibility of this life compared with otherworldly life. These teachings consider it unbefitting for humans to lower themselves by sufficing themselves with this world.

﴿قُل مَتاعُ الدُّنیا قَلیلٌ و الأَخِرَةُ خَیرٌ لِّمَنِ اتَّقیٰ و لا تُظلَمونَ فَتیلاً﴾

*"Say, 'The goods and chattels of this world is little and the Hereafter is better for those who fear Allah and you shall not be wronged [even as much as] a single date-fiber.'"*[1]

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[1] - *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:77.

﴿وَ ما هٰذِهِ الحَياةَ الدُّنيآ إلّا لَهوٌ و لَعِبٌ و إنَّ الدّارَ الأخِرَةَ لَهِیَ الحَيَوانُ﴾

> *"And this worldly life is naught but diversion and sport but surely the abode of the Hereafter is true life."*[1]

This sort of worldview mitigates our pains and hardships, and because of it, recalling death is a consolation.

2. If the first factor of fear regarding death is eliminated, unawareness of the time of one's death will become insignificant. In fact, it is not clear whether knowing the time of death would truly comfort us or not. Not knowing the time of death helps us utilize every moment of our lives in the best possible manner. It is important to remember death so that we may sustain a correct course in every moment of our lives and so that our lives do not fall into a monotone. Forgetting death results in forgetting eternal life and also causes self-neglect. Noble 'Alī ('a) advised his followers thus:

> "May God pardon your sins. Provide for the journey as you have been ordered insistently to march and regard your stay in this world as brief."[2]

مرا در منزل جانان چه امن عیش چون هر دم

جرس فریاد می دارد که بربندید محمل‌ها

*How can I live securely in the abode of the living while every moment;*

*The bell continually cries, 'Hitch your supplies!'*

3. The third factor causing fear is averted by those whose knowledge surpasses the boundaries of the limited—that is, the wellsprings of eternal knowledge. Divine legates and prophets have made us aware of this hidden abode and have revealed unto us the invisible countenance of existence. It was asked of Imam Jawād ('a), "Why does death distress some Moslems?" He replied, "It distresses them because they do not understand it. If they understood it and were

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[1] *Sūrah 'Ankabūt* 29:64.

[2] *Nahj ul-Balāghah*, Sermon 28. From the translation of *Fayz ul-Islam*.

friends of God, they would love death and they would know that the Hereafter is better for them than this world."[1]

4. Death is a stage in human existence and it is an upholder of our existence. Like all our existential aspects, death is a constituent of our self. We cannot make others partner in our experiences of sorrow and happiness, adolescence and maturity, sickness and health, or even our sleep and wakefulness. These affairs are not within the domain of common experience. People's death, like their birth, is unique to each person.

5. The mentioned states in the fifth fear factor of death are the conditions of the world of separation and schism [between humans and God]. It is not evident whether these states will endure with the continuance of our existence. Everything in this world is subject to change and vicissitude. There are no stable states in this world. Divine religions expound and explicate the circumstances of the natural world. They interpret them objectively and factually and thus free humanity from fallacious interpretations.

The trials and tribulations of the natural world induce the founts of perfections within humans to gush forth and they make our virtues shine. That which belongs to us will not be taken away and we shall enter the next world with all the true wealth that each of us has amassed in the course of this life.

Moreover, another fear factor for death is fear of the reckoning. The faithful believe in the reckoning and do not fear death in spite of it. However, the unfaithful fear death *because* of the reckoning. The divine religion guides humans by showing the way to prepare for their future and it frees humanity of this deadlock.

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[1] Sadūq, *Ma'ānī ul-Akhbār (Meanings of Narrations)*, p. 290.

## Section Three

## Philosophical Approaches to Human Immortality

Various interpretations have been presented regarding human immortality. In this discussion, by immortality we mean the imperishability of humans after death of their body. *Impersonal* immortality is not the subject of this discussion. An example of impersonal immortality is the representation of immortality through our progeny and descendants. Various psychologists state that mental states such as preference of male children over female children and mental disorders such as discontentment due to lack of children originate from this feeling. In addition, conviction of the legendary status of one's name and memory among the living is another type of impersonal immortality. Humans regard endurance of their names, works, and progeny as the endurance of their selves. Some of those that regard humans as entirely corporeal and do not believe in human immortality, sometimes comfort themselves and others by impersonal immortality, yet the chief aspiration of humanity is not this type of immortality.

Because of the differences of opinion regarding the nature of humanity, personal immortality has been portrayed in various manners. Therefore, some portrayals are based upon the existence of the soul and its incorporeality and others, which do not advocate the incorporeal soul, depict human immortality solely in terms of the body. Herein, we have included some renditions that are not based on the existence of the soul:

### 1. Corporal Reanimation:

Those who believe that the human essence is restricted to its material body and that the individual identity is determined through its respective body yet accept human immortality usually explain it as restoration of the dead or reassembly of the decomposed body through divine providence. Hence, we are faced with two opinions. One is the belief that the human body, which constitutes the entire identity of the individual, is annihilated after death and recreated by God at the

Resurrection.[1] The other is the belief that the human body in composed of both main and subsidiary elements. According to this belief, personal identity is related to the body's main elements, which are constant throughout life and are not destroyed after death but are disjoined and shall be rejoined at the Resurrection.[2]

According to these two views, humans lack life until the Resurrection and they gain new life in the true sense of the term when they are resurrected.

### 2. Subtle or Ethereal Body:

This theory pertains to those who believe in the soul's independence from the body but do not regard it incorporeal. According to this belief, the soul is a subtle body that has no mass or weight but possesses some material qualities such as shape and size. The subtle body exists within the corporeal body throughout one's worldly life. It departs the body after death and persists thereupon independent of the body.

As per this concept, life of the corporal body is not inherent; rather, it is essentially inanimate and acquires life through association with the subtle body whose life is intrinsic. The body that is continually changing throughout the life of the individual is the corporal anatomy. This anatomy is an *excrescence* upon the subtle or ethereal body and is shed at the time of death.[3] This theory is grounded on contemporary spiritual research.

The common factor in these two theories is that they do not consider the incorporeal soul to be the origin of the identity and do not support an eternal soul. In the discussion on human nature, we have shown that the human constitution cannot be considered solely material and some of humanity's states and conditions cannot be explained without the existence of a soul. Hence, the inaccuracy of these theories regarding immortality is made obvious.

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1- See: ‘Aẓud ad-Dīn-e ’Ījī, *[Sharḥ-e] Muwāfiq (Commentary of Muwāfiq)*, vol. 8, p. 289.

2- See: Allāmah Ḥillī, *Sharḥ-e Tajrīd ul-I‘tiqād (Commentary of the Belief of Incorporeality)*, pp. 402-403.

3- Murtaḍā Muṭaharī, *Ma‘ād (Eschatology or Resurrection)*, p. 24.

The ensuing theories regarding immortality are based on the existence of a spiritual and immaterial aspect to humanity.

### 1. The Unincorporated [*nāmutajassid*] Soul

The first person to explicate and expound this theory was Plato. According to his perspective, the human soul, which belongs to the plane of divine and incorporeal beings, has existed before its body. After its fall, the soul became entangled in the tenebrous world of materiality. The body is only a tool for the soul in worldly life. After the death of the body, the soul returns to its original abode, which is free of material and body. When Socrates was asked how he should be buried, he replied:

> "As you please, provided I remain still with you, and do not make my escape elsewhere… as soon as the poison has operated I shall remain no longer here, but be transported to the mansions of the blest…"[1]

This perspective does not regard corporeal existence to have a share in human immortality. Advocates of this theory explain parapsychological phenomena in diverse manners.

A noteworthy point is that Plato's theory regarding the existence of the human soul before creation of the material body is accepted among many Moslem mystics and philosophers; even so, the theory that the incorporeal soul is eternally severed from a material body is unacceptable to them.

Regarding severance from the divine plane, Jalāl ad-Dīn Mawlavī declares:

بشنو از نی چون حکایت می‌کند از جدایی‌ها شکایت می‌کند

کز نیستان تا مرا بُبریده‌اند در نفیرم مرد و زن نالیده‌اند

*Listen to the reed pipe (humanity) as it tells a story;*
*It complains of separations.*
*That as I was severed from my true abode;*
*Men and women wailed of my sorrow.*[2]

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[1] *Plato: Complete Works, Phaedrus (Phaedon).*

[2] Jalal ad-Din Mawlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spititual Couplets)*, Book I, verses 1-2.

In his renowned elegy, Ibn-e Sīnā (Avicenna) states:

> "A mighty and self-disciplined dove (the human soul) descended towards you (the natural world) from its lofty heights… I guess it has forgotten the covenants it had pledged in its homeland and the habitats that it was unwilling to leave…"

Of course, these two words can be interpreted differently, so that this passage does not signify the existence of a soul before its body but merely that the soul is a supernatural entity.

As we shall explain in the Quranic section, return of the soul without any material body at the Resurrection is not accepted by the Noble Quran. Therefore, even though various Muslim philosophers such as Ibn-e Sīnā (Avicenna) reached an impasse in attempting to prove the reattachment of the soul to a corporeal body, they would accept spiritual-material resurrection because of their faith in divine revelation. This acceptance signifies the clarity of the Quran in depicting the presence of a body in the afterworld, such that Muslim philosophers, who prefer divine revelation and utilize reason to explicate religious statements, regarded material presence in the afterlife a certainty. Humanity does not have a short-term relationship with the body; rather, the body is an integral part of the reality of humankind. If it is such that neither the body nor the soul can be disregarded in the nature of humanity, the interpretation of Ibn-e Sīnā must be challenged as to how it can be possible that there is no body in the span between this life and the next while there is a soul and human individual.

### 2. Metempsychosis (Reincarnation)

According to this tenet, which is advocated by most Indian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, only few humans continue their existence with an incorporal soul after death while most return to worldly life in a new form and body in successive cycles. This regenerative cycle of life and death continues without interruption until individuals are successful in purifying their respective souls of material restrictions, which is the only way to realize freedom from this unending cycle. Persons that cannot purify their souls shall perpetually remain in the cycle of corporal and worldly life.

There is a difference of opinion among advocates of this belief in whether the soul necessarily enters human bodies or may also enter animal bodies after disjunction of the soul and prior body. At any rate, the law that determines the manner of rebirth and causes transmigration of the soul into a superior or inferior body is called *Karma*. Karma determines the future life of each human. This law states that our deeds, speech, and beliefs dictate our future fate and the connection between one's current and subsequent body is justified in this manner. In their rebirth, the soul enters a body corresponding to the habits and ethical characteristics of the individual's previous life. This is why religions that support this concept prohibit consuming meat and harassing animals. After death, evil humans are reincarnated within human fetuses that possess inferior social statuses or in weak or lowly bodies as the consequence of their deeds.

According to the concept of metempsychosis, persons who free themselves of the continuous cycle of rebirth shall live on in an absolute spiritual state and as long as they remain in the regenerative cycle, they endure spiritual-physical punishment.[1]

Proponents of this concept have presented many philosophic, dialectic [*kalāmī*], and empiric rationales. However, not only are these rationales unjustified but there are grounds that show the absence of demonstrability and invalidity of the doctrine of metempsychosis.

In the first place, one must ask, how can the sameness of a person at time A and time B be demonstrated? Each of us lives through stages whose material and psychological qualities differ; nevertheless, links called memories connect these stages to each other. The existence of memories validates the individual unity of a person. However, how can the concept of metempsychosis show the sameness of the soul in the two periods of A and B? If the criterion is persistence of memories, in nearly all instances the individual has no recollection of previous existences. If the criterion is material persistence, again this is not applicable in metempsychosis because according to this concept, the individual is sometimes reincarnated as a woman, sometimes as a man, and sometimes as an animal. If the criterion is similarity of psychological tendencies, the duality of individual X and individual Y who live at the same time cannot be justified. In other words, the problem is how much similarity in mental attributes demonstrates the sameness of two individuals.[1] Consequently, the persistence of an individual identity in two time periods is not possible.

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[1] Nass, John B., *The Comprehensive History of Religions*.

In the second place, the doctrine of metempsychosis is fundamentally fallacious because as we have stated in our analysis of the nature of death, death is traveling beyond the natural world not mere detachment of the body and soul. Accordingly, we cannot accept that the soul can be incarnated within a new body after disjuncture from its previous body and persist in the natural world. To state matters differently, in their essential evolution, humans pass through various stages—one of which is the stage of corporal attachment—and reach a state in which they no longer need the mundane world. Therefore, this doctrine is like the return of an adult to childhood or return from perfection to fault which is not acceptable.

In addition, the relationship of every soul with its body is unique. Thus, there cannot be a relationship between a soul and another body.

Various divine verses and narrations [*riwāyat*] of the Immaculates (‘a) do affirm the transformation of some humans into animal forms. Some of these verses state that God damns some people and they turn into apes or pigs. Additionally, various narrations state that some people shall be resurrected with faces much uglier than the faces of apes and pigs.

These statements do not affirm this doctrine of reincarnation since the issue of resurrection in the Hereafter is essentially different from the concept of metempsychosis, which is the return of the soul to the natural world after its disassociation from its previous body. Therefore, statements regarding manifestation of individuals in the afterworld in bodies that are formed of their worldly beliefs and actions—in other words, the manifestation of the reality of each human in the Hereafter—is unrelated to the concept of metempsychosis. The two main reasons for this are as follows:

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1- John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion.*

i. The supposed bodies that the concept of metempsychosis speaks of are not truly related to each other; however, the body that is the manifestation of actions is a body that has directly resulted from the self and its volitional beliefs and actions.

ii. The successive bodies in the concept of metempsychosis are natural bodies; however, the body that is the manifestation of actions is not natural.

According to Jalāl ad-Dīn Mawlavī:

> *So the resurrection of the envious on the Day of Judgment;*
> *Shall doubtless be in the form of wolves.*
> *The resurrection of the avaricious carrion-eating scoundrel;*
> *Shall be in the form of a pig on the Day of Reckoning.*
> *Fornicators shall have stinking private parts;*
> *Alcohol-drinkers shall have foul-smelling mouths.*
> *The character that is predominant within your being;*
> *Must necessarily be the basis for your constitution at Resurrection.*
> *One moment a wolf will spring from humanity;*
> *The next, a second Joseph shining as the moon.*[1]

### 3. Life in the Barzakh and Qīyāmat (Resurrection)

The third view regarding immortality is based on segregation of the afterworld into the two planes of Barzakh and Qiyāmat (which literally means the rise). According to this view, which has been extracted from the Quran and traditions, in this world humans are an amalgam of soul [*nafs*] and corporal body. At the time of death, their intellectual attachment is temporarily severed. The soul persists in a plane called Barzakh and the body is decomposed and diffused through the natural order of the world. Ultimately, at Qīyāmat the bodies are recollected, the souls regain intellectual attachment with their respective bodies, and thus humans, that is, amalgams of body and soul, enter the afterlife.

Adherents of this ideology are not like-minded on the question of the attachment of soul and body in the plane of Barzakh. In the theory of unincorporated soul, we have stated that some Muslim intellectuals regard the human soul without a body in the plane of Barzakh. However, others regard the soul attached to an *ideal body* [*badan-e mithālī*] that is similar to the material body of the individual. Of course, the properties of these two bodies are very different from each other. Additionally, this ideal body is unlike the subtle or ethereal body discussed previously.

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[1] 1- Jalal ad-Din Mawlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spiritual Couplets)*, Book II, verses 1413-1415, and 1420-1421.

In any event, according to this theory, because humans are an amalgam of body and soul and have partial material perceptions, there is a body corresponding with the plane of Barzakh in the essence of every human. At the time of natural death, the soul and its attached ideal body enters the plane of Barzakh. Mawlavī says:

> *For the soul, the unity of God is more pleasurable;*
> *Other than its apparent form, it has other hands and feet.*
> *These hands and feet can be seen in dreams and divine union;*
> *Deem it true, do not regard it as an exaggeration.*
> *It is your bodiless self that has a body;*
> *So fear not of the withdrawal of the soul from your body.*[1]

In Qīyāmat, the soul will have a corporal body, but not with the precepts and requisites of the worldly body; instead, by reaching perfection the material body becomes congruent with the afterworld, which is the world of perpetuity and lack of deterioration. We shall return to this issue in later discussions.

### The Quality of Immortality according to Islam

Among the previously stated perspectives, other than the theories of metempsychosis and subtle body, which have some supporters among Muslim intellectuals, the preceding perspective is more proportionate with Islamic anthropological principles and the Quran and traditions.

### Barzakh

Literally, Barzakh means the barrier or boundary between two things. In eschatological discussions, it is the gap between the end of worldly life (i.e. death) and the commencement of Qīyāmat. As we have indicated, the segregation of life after death into Barzakh and Qīyāmat is one of the teachings of the prophets and divine scriptures and philosophers, who have speculated upon eschatological issues, have utilized these sources. According to this tenet, humans experience three disparate lives: Natural life, Barzakh life, and Ākhirat[1] Life. Accordingly, it is clear that the eternal life spoken of by divine religions is the Ākhirat Life, which begins after the initial stages of Qīyāmat.

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[1] Jalal aḍ-Din Mawlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spiritual Couplets)*, Book III, verses 1611-1613.

Many Quranic verses attest to the existence of the span of Barzakh:

﴿حَتّىٰ اذا جاء اَحَدَهُمُ الموتُ قالَ ربِّ ارجِعُون. لَعَلّي اَعمَلُ صالحا فيما تَرَكتُ، كَلّا اِنَّها كَلِمَةٌ هو قائِلُها و مِن وَرائِهِم برزخٌ الى يومِ يُبعَثُون﴾

*"Until, when death comes unto one of them, he says, 'My Lord! Return me! Surely I shall act righteously in that which I have forsook.' Never! It is just a word he speaks and behind them is an intermission (Barzakh) till the day they shall be resurrected."*[2]

According to this verse, it seems that returning to the world is not possible after true death. Moreover, between the end of worldly life and the Day of Judgment or Qīyāmat there is an intermission called Barzakh.

﴿قالوا ربّنا اَمَتَّنا اثنَتَينِ و اَحْيَيتَنا اثنَتَينِ فاعْتَرَفْنا بِذُنُوبِنا فَهَل إلىٰ خُرُوجٍ مِّن سَبيل﴾

*"They shall say, 'Our Lord! You have caused us two deaths and have given us two lives. We confess to our sins, now, is there any escape route [from Hell]?"*[3]

This verse reveals two issues:

i. That which was also revealed from the first verse, that is, there is an interval, called Barzakh, between death and afterlife.

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[1] This is derived from the Quranic term *dār ul-ākhirah*, which means 'the Last Abode'.

[2] *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:99-100.

[3] *Sūrah Ghāfir* 40:11.

ii. Humans are alive and aware in the recess of Barzakh, not annihilated and silent.

According to this verse, after unbelievers realize two deaths and two lives after their worldly lives, they attest to their faith and confess their sins in order to be delivered from retribution. The story of the two deaths and two lives is thus: at the end of their worldly lives, God causes the death of humans and introduces them into the life of Barzakh. At the end of Barzakh life, again He causes the death of humans and accords them with new eternal life. Therefore, there is life in Barzakh because otherwise two deaths cannot come about.

One might state that by accepting Barzakh life, each individual would have three lives (worldly life, Barzakh life, and later life in the hereafter). That which frees unbelievers of doubt and brings about their conviction are two resurrections in Barzakh and Qīyāmat.[1] Their worldly life did not cause conviction within them because in their earthly life they denied life after death:

﴿إِنَّ هٰؤُلَآءِ لَيَقولون. إِنْ هيَ إِلَّا مَوتَتُنا الأُولىٰ وَ ما نَحنُ بِمُنشَرين﴾

*"Surely these [unbelievers] say: There is nothing but our first death and we shall not be revived."*[2]

The following verse signifies that the Quran regards death as transferal from one type of life to another:

﴿و لا تقولوا لَمَن يُقتَل في سبيل اللهِ امواتٌ، بل احياءٌ و لكن لا تشعرون﴾

*"And do not call those who have died in the way of Allah dead; rather, they are alive but you do not realize."*[3]

This verse is a short but clear report of the Barzakh life of the martyrs [*shuhadā'*] of God because the life of martyrs only differs in the manner of their Barzakh life not its reality. Since the terms "do not call...dead" and "you do not realize" are addressed to the faithful, one cannot say that the meaning of this verse is that martyrs are alive at

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[1] Allāmah Ṭabāṭabāī, *Tafsīr-e Al-Mīzān (Al-Mīzān Exegesis)*, vol. 17, p. 313.

[2] *Sūrah Dukhān* 44:34-35.

[3] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:154.

Qīyāmat because this fact was already evident and accepted by the faithful.

## Barzakh Body

Visualizing life in Barzakh without allowing for an immaterial aspect in humans is difficult. This is because after death, the material body decomposes and alters into constituent elements that can no longer be called a human body. Furthermore, according to the verse "*Allah completely retracts souls at the time of their deaths and also souls that have not died, in their sleep. So, He holds souls upon which He has decreed death and returns the rest until an appointed end…*"[1] essentially, the buried material body has no soul. Therefore, life and retribution in Barzakh cannot be attributed to such a body. On the other hand, if humans are merely soul, which according to philosophers can only perceive general and intangible truths, how can it perceive the material punishments and rewards of Barzakh, which are mentioned in the Quran and Hadith? Thus, some Muslim philosophers regard humans in Barzakh as possessing an ideal body that corresponds with the plane of Barzakh and which has been derived from the individual's actions and beliefs, that is, the person's volitional identity.

In this world, our earthly bodies are attached to our souls. By abandoning its corporeal body our soul enters the plane of Barzakh with a body similar in appearance to its material body. Moreover, various Hadith state that when God withdraws the soul, He gives it a form similar to its worldly form such that an acquaintance that sees the individual will recognize him or her. The perception of bodily forms in dreams, helps in understanding the Barzakh body. Even though this body possesses geometric dimensions and corporal qualities such as color, it is devoid of materiality and its qualities including mass and weight.

Advocates of the ideal body are not in agreement regarding the manner of its genesis. According to one perspective, this ideal body is created independently and after severance of the soul's bond with its material body, and then it unites with its ideal body. Another view states that the ideal body is not a detached reality from the soul but an existential facet of the soul that appears after death.

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[1] *Sūrah Zumar* 39:42.

**Ākhirat Life**

According to logical and traditional rationales for the incorporeality of the soul, the fact that the soul endures after death and is present in the plane of Barzakh and the Ākhirat is indisputable. Various Quranic verses describe nonmaterial rewards in Ākhirat that can only be attributed to the existence of the soul in Ākhirat. For example, in *Sūrah Tawbah* it is stated:

> *"Allah has promised faithful men and women gardens underneath [the trees of] which rivers flow, therein to dwell forever, and also pure abodes in perpetual paradises and greater [than all these] is the satisfaction of Allah. That is the great triumph."*[1]

Apparently, in this verse, the Noble Quran places the satisfaction and gratification of God against the material pleasures of the faithful and regards it greater than these pleasures. It is clear that it is a pleasure that is realized not with the material body but with the human intellect and soul. Therefore, there is no doubt that Islam agrees with the spiritual immortality of humans. However, the discussion does not end here because there are many verses that indicate the material presence of humans in Ākhirat.

1. Some of these verses attest to the existence of the human body on the Day of Judgment. These verses can be divided into various categories:

   a. Some verses denote that in the wake of death humans return to the earth and afterwards on the Day of Resurrection, they reemerge from it. For example:

   ﴿مِنها خَلَقناكم و فيها نُعيدُكُم و منها نُخرِجُكُم تارةً أُخرىٰ﴾

   *"Out of the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and We shall withdraw you from it once more."*[2]

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[1] *Sūrah Tawbah* 9:72.

[2] *Sūrah Ṭāhā* 20:55. Also see: *Sūrah Nūḥ* 71:18; *Sūrah Rūm* 30:25; and *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:25.

b. Other verses explicitly state that on the Day of Resurrection all humans shall rise from their graves:

﴿وَ نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَإِذا هُم مِّنَ الاجداثِ إلى رَبِّهِم يَنسِلُونَ﴾

*"And the Horn shall be blown. Then suddenly they shall emerge from their graves to hasten towards their Lord."*[1]

It is self-evident that emergence from one's grave pertains to the human body not soul.

c. Various verses speak of parts of the human body in the Ākhirat. These verses are also clear denotations of corporeal resurrection since it is evident that the immaterial soul does not have body parts:

﴿اليَومَ نَختِمُ على افواهِهِم وَ تُكَلِّمُنا أَيديهِم وَ تَشهَدُ أَرجُلُهُم بِما كانوا يَكسِبونَ﴾

*"Today, We seal their mouths and their hands speak to Us and their feet bear witness to what they have been earning."*[2]

Fundamentally, the people's understanding of the Prophet's (ṣ) enjoinment to immortality was somatic resurrection and the Prophet (ṣ) did not refute this understanding.[3]

2. In addition to the first genre of verses, which denote the presence of the human body in the Ākhirat, other verses openly speak of bodily rewards and punishments in Ākhirat. Many Quranic verses speak of "heavenly gardens", "pleasant shade", "varieties of foods and dishes", "medleys of clothes and adornments", etc. On the other hand, many verses speak of "burning in the fires of Hell", "appalling food and drink", "fiery malodorous clothes", "deathly winds", "iron maces", etc. Each of these denotes a part of the physical rewards or

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[1] *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:51. Also see: *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:7; *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:52; *Sūrah Qamar* 54:7; *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:43.

[2] *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:65. Also see: *Sūrah Nūr* 24:24; *Sūrah Fuṣṣilat* 41:20-21; *Sūrah 'Abas* 80:38, 80:41. Additionally, the Noble Quran has enumerated historical examples of resurrection, such as the story of 'Uzīr (Ezra) and the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus [*aṣḥāb-e kahf*], all of which are congruent with the corporal aspect of the resurrection.

[3] See: *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:35-36; and *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:78.

punishments of the inhabitants of Ākhirat. This genre of verses also indicates corporal presence since without a body, perceiving material bounties or chastisements is not possible.[1]

In light of these accounts, we can conclude that according to Islam, the immortality of human beings is physical/spiritual and that our existential reality, in both material and spiritual aspects, will be completely present in the Hereafter.

### Ākhirat Body

We have made it clear that according to Islam, the human resurrection includes both spiritual and corporal aspects. Now, it may be asked: Is our Ākhirat body the same as our earthly body or is it different? In answer, some Muslim scholars support the first possibility and believe that on the Day of Resurrection each person's earthly body will be restored and reattached to the soul. These scholars maintain that specific verses, such as those that indicate the exodus of humans from their grave,[2] distinctly demonstrate the factuality of this opinion. In addition, divine justice demands that the next world's physical rewards and punishments be delivered upon the same body that was occupied in righteous or immoral deeds.

Other Islamic authorities hold that even though people's Ākhirat bodies are material—and of clay—it is not necessary that they be the same as their earthly bodies; rather, they are merely similar to their previous bodies in form. In order to prove their theory, these experts make use of various Quranic verses that speak of the creation of a "likeness" of each person in the Hereafter:

﴿أَوَ لَيسَ الّذي خَلَقَ السَماواتِ و الأَرضَ بِقادرٍ على أن يَخلُقَ مِثْلَهُم؛ بَلىٰ وَ هُوَ الخَلّاقُ العَلِيمُ﴾

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[1] In addition to Quranic verses, many narrations also indicate the corporal facet of resurrection. However, in favor of brevity, we shall refrain from further elaboration.

[2] Such as *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:51; *Sūrah Qamar* 54:7; *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:43; and *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:7.

> *"Is not He who created the heavens and earth able to create the like of them; yes indeed [he can], and He is the Creator (of all), the All-knowing."*[1]

Naturally, these scholars maintain that there is no contradiction between the material dissimilarity of earthly and otherworldly bodies and the "sameness" of the individual. This dissimilarity does not result in the reunited person at Resurrection being different from the person that existed in the natural world. This is because the identity of an individual pertains to its soul and the person's soul in the Hereafter is the same soul that was attached to the individual's physical body in the mundane world.

Meanwhile, various Islamic theologians have taken a different path that more comprehensively illuminates Islamic teachings on this subject. They believe that our otherworldly bodies are perfected versions of our natural bodies and even though they are distinct in their existential perfection, they are individually equivalent to our respective natural bodies.

On this basis, the otherworldly bodies of all individuals are the same as their mundane bodies with the difference that they have left behind the limitations and faults of their natural stage and have become perfect and complete bodies. This is because the Ākhirat is an absolutely perfect world not a revision of the natural world. Hence, Ākhirat bodies are exempt of all diseases and blights and never become old and decrepit. Naturally, this perspective is grounded on specific philosophical principles that are too comprehensive to be discussed in this brief treatise.[2]

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1- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:81.

2- This view was first presented by Sadr ul-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī (Mullāṣadrā) in the form of a philosophical theory. Later, Ḥakīm Āqā 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī reformed it. This theory is based upon principles such as *Basicality of Being* [*iṣālat-e wujūd*], *Analogicity of Being* [*tashkīk-e wujūd*], and *Evolution of Quiddity* [*ḥarikat-e jawharī*].

## Section Four

## Life in the Hereafter as stated by the Quran

The Noble Quran extensively examines the issue of Ākhirat life. Some Quranic verses concern the principle of resurrection (eschatology) [*ma'ād*] and respond to the criticisms of deniers. Other verses in this regard shed light on the resurrection of the dead and the state of humans in the Hereafter (Ākhirat). These two issues shall be briefly elucidated in the following sections.

### The Possibility and Necessity of Resurrection

The Holy Quran has reinforced the intellectual basis of the resurrection of the dead on two fundamental levels. Firstly, it proves the *possibility* of the occurrence of resurrection, and shows that the presence of the human body and soul in the Hereafter is not impossible. Secondly, it presents rationales for the occurrence of the resurrection of the dead and it not only shows that bringing back to life of all human dead before the final judgment shall occur, but it proves that it is *necessary* for it to occur.

Generally, in Islam all enjoinments of the prophet are concomitant with challenges [*taḥaddī*]. The prophet challenges all people and encourages them to express any rationale or evidence they have against his enjoinments. Alongside his enjoinment, the prophet was appointed by God to tell the people, *"Produce your proof if you speak truly."*[1] The purpose of this *challenge* is abandonment of skepticism and doubt and embracement of rational arguments and evidence.

### A. Possibility of the Resurrection

The Quran shows the possibility of the resurrection of the dead in various manners.

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[1] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:111.

### 1. Lack of Reasoning for Denial of Resurrection:

Various verses declare that deniers of Ākhirat life have no firm and reasonable rationale for their claims. On the one hand, by studying verses that quote the claims of deniers we realize that these people have no weapon other than considering the resurrection of the dead to be improbable. Using various questions, they endeavor to show that the issue of renewed life and return to God is irrational.[1] In addition, they sometimes slander the prophets and divine representatives who inform people of the resurrection and they call them mad or liars[2], or they regard the tenet of resurrection a superstitious myth.[3] On the other hand, many verses state that refutation of resurrection is an untrue and baseless assumption and is not grounded on logical foundations:

> *"And they say, 'there is nothing but our worldly lives; we die and we live and nothing but time annihilates us' and they have no knowledge of this; they merely assume. And when Our clear signs are recited unto them, their only argument is that they say, 'Bring us our fathers if you speak truly.'"*[4]

In the first verse, after indicating the claim of the deniers of resurrection, it is lucidly stated that this claim is not based on knowledge, but originates only from speculation and conjecture. In the second verse, it is stated that when faced with rational arguments for the resurrection and Ākhirat life, deniers attempt to justify themselves with an unfounded rationale. The say, "Raise our ancestors in order that we accept the resurrection."[5]

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[1] *"And they say, 'When we become bones and broken bits shall we really be raised up again in a new creation?'"* (*Sūrah Isrā'* 17:49) *"And they say, 'When we disappear into the earth, shall we truly have a new creation?'"* (*Sūrah Sajdah* 32:10)

[2] *"And the unbelievers say, 'Shall we show to you a man who will tell you that when you have been utterly torn to pieces, then you shall have a new creation? Has he forged against God a lie or is he insane?'"* (*Sūrah Saba'* 34:7-8)

[3] *"This has been promised to us and our forebears before; it is nothing but the fantasies of the ancients."* (*Sūrah Naml* 27:68)

[4] *Sūrah Jāthiyah* 45:24-25.

[5] Also see: *Sūrah Inshiqāq* 84:14; *Sūrah Qaṣaṣ* 28:39; and *Sūrah Kahf* 18:36.

## 2. Creation of the First Human:

Contemplation of the primary genesis of humanity facilitates accepting the Resurrection since God who created humans in the first place is surely able to revive them:

﴿و هو الذي يبدء الخلق ثم يعيده و هو أهون عليه﴾

> *"And He is the one who originates Creation then renews it and this is easier for Him."*[1]

﴿قل يحييها الذي انشأها اوّل مرّة﴾

> *"Say, 'He shall resurrect them who originated them the first time."*[2]

As stated by the Quran, human Ākhirat life is like a new creation and He who was able to create humans in the first place is also able to *recreate* them. Nonetheless, deniers of Resurrection doubt the recreation even though they accept the original creation![3]

﴿افعيينا بالخلق الاوّل بل هم في لبس من خلق جديد﴾

> *"Have We been wearied by the first creation? [Indeed not]; however, they doubt the new creation."*[4]

Yea, little thought regarding our original creation is enough to make us fathom the possibility of our renewed life after death and resolve all doubts.

﴿يا ايّها الناس ان كنتم في ريب من البعث فانّا خلقناكم من تراب ثمّ من نطفة...﴾

> *"O people! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, hence [know] We have created you from dust then from sperm..."*[1]

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1- *Sūrah Rūm* 30:27.

2- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:79.

3- A denier of the Resurrection brought a decayed bone to the Prophet (ṣ) and asked, "Who shall resurrect this?" While regarding this question a result of forgetting the original genesis of humanity, the Quran replies, "*Say, 'He shall resurrect them who originated them the first time.*" (*Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:78-79).

4- *Sūrah Qāf* 50:15.

### 3. The Illimitable Power of God:

The unlimited power of God is another reason for the possibility of the Resurrection. After reminding us of the aspects of God's power in the creation of the universe, the Noble Quran emphasizes the fact that such a potent Creator can surely restore the dead to life. All possible deeds are easy for the Omnipotent. In fact, basically, the ease or difficulty of an action is stated in terms of limited powers. Therefore, one should not doubt the possibility of the occurrence of Resurrection because of its magnitude:[2]

> *"Have they not seen that Allah who created the heavens and earth and was not wearied by creating them is able to revive the dead? Yes indeed; verily, He is capable of all things."*[3]

### 4. Examples of Resurrection in Nature:

A further method the Quran uses to resolve doubt of Resurrection is enjoining humans to contemplate nature and the exhibition of the life and death of natural phenomena. According to the Quran, the growth of beautiful and vigorous plants from dead earth is an objective and palpable example of the resurrection in Qīyāmat and it further clarifies its possibility:

> *"And He is who sends the winds as a foretoken before His grace [of rain], till when they are charged with heavy clouds, We convey them to a dead land, then, from them We send down water, and from them We bring forth all types of fruits. In this manner We shall bring forth the dead [from their graves]; haply you will remember."*[4]

### 5. Historic Examples of Resurrection:

Some Quranic verses reveal historic occurrences or objective examples of human resurrection. Hence, a person who witnessed these

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1- *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:5.

2- If we regard this issue from a philosophic point of view, it is clear that the occurrence of Resurrection is not an essential or logical impossibility, which would necessitate a contradiction. By keeping in mind that the absolute power of God is comprised of the ability to accomplish all possible acts, Resurrection is not outside the domain of Divine Power.

3- *Sūrah Aḥqāf* 46:33.

4- *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:57.

occurrences or accepted their occurrence on authoritative grounds should not have any problem with accepting the possibility of the Resurrection. After relating these historical phenomena, the Quran indicates their relationship with the Resurrection and regards these miraculous incidents as portents of the Day of Resurrection.

One example of these historical events is the experience of a person who was passing by the ruins of a city and the question crossed his mind as to how God would bring the bodies of the dead back to life. By divine providence, this person dies and is resurrected one hundred years later.[1]

> *"Or such as he who passed upon a city whose walls and roofs had collapsed and said [to himself], 'How shall Allah bring this back to life now that it is dead?' So Allah made him die for a hundred years and then raised him..."*[2]

### B. Necessity of the Resurrection

As we have previously stated, the Holy Quran does not suffice at showing that the Resurrection is possible. In fact, various Quranic verses explain the necessity of the Resurrection. The content of these verses is such that a logical argument for the *necessity* of Resurrection can be extracted from them. These verses usually emphasize a divine attribute and consider the occurrence of Resurrection as a necessary condition of this respective attribute. Herein, we shall enumerate several such rationales:

#### 1. Divine Wisdom:

In the discussion on divine attributes, we stated that God is wise. That is, He does not perform useless acts and all His actions have logical purposes. Of course, the finality of divine acts does not contradict His absolute needlessness of others since these purposes pertain to His creations and contribute to their perfection and their interests. They are surely not in answer to a need of the Creator of the Worlds.

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[1] The Quran does not mention this person's name or the place of this occurrence. However, various narrations indicate that this individual was Ezra [*'Uzayr*] the prophet and others state that it was Jeremiah [Irmiya'] the prophet. Moreover, some narrations declare that the place of this incident was the city of Jerusalem [*bayt ul-muqaddas*].

[2] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:259.

Consequently, the creation of humans, who are the greatest of creations, cannot be in vain; rather, its purpose is that they attain perfections befitting their unique station.

On the other hand, it is apparent that the natural world, and our worldly lives within it, cannot by itself guaranty our perfection. This is because this world is fleeting and our lives in it are suffused with restrictions and deprivations, whereas humanity is a creature that has both an innate tendency to eternal life and also the capability of immortality due to the existence of an incorporeal soul.

Accordingly, divine wisdom requires that the purpose of our creation be realized and that we humans attain our worthy perfection. Complete fulfillment of this purpose is not possible in this world. Therefore, it is necessary that human life endure after death in order to prevent it from being in vain. Regarding this issue, the Holy Quran states:

﴿افحسبتم انّما خلقناكم عبثا و انكم الينا لاترجعون. فتعالى الله الملك الحق...﴾

> *"Did you think that We created you in vain and that you will not be returned to Us? And exalted is Allah, the King, the Righteous..."*[1]

This verse reveals the fact that if there is no return to God after death and our existence ends with our passing then our creation would be in vain whereas the judicious God is too great to perform a useless act.

The Quran holds that if there is no Resurrection and Ākhirat, not only would the creation of humanity be in vain, but also the creation of the natural world would be for nothing:

﴿و ما خلقنا السماوات و الأَرضَ و ما بينهما الّا بالحق، و انّ الساعة لآتية...﴾

> *"And We have not created the heavens and earth and all in between save in justice; and surely the Hour shall come."*[2]

After stating the fact that the creation of the heavens and earth and all in between is righteous and exempt from futility, God immediately indicates the inevitable occurrence of the Resurrection. It seems that the purposefulness of creation depends on the existence of the Resurrection and Ākhirat. This is why many deniers of otherworldly life become nihilists. By restricting the existence of humans to worldly life, they see it as nothing but extra-redundancy and a cause for bewilderment. According to nihilists, humanity is a lost and confused caravan that has entered the desert without purpose, following a cycle rotating in vain.

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[1] *Sūrah Mu'minūn* 23:115-116.

[2] *Sūrah Ḥijr* 15:85.

### 2. Divine Justice:

Justice is one of God's attributes. One aspect of divine justice is that the faithful and righteous must be worthily reimbursed, and unbelievers and sinners must be punished accordingly. However, we see that because of its various restrictions, the natural world does not possess the capacity to reward and punish all the deeds of human beings since all worldly blessings and pleasures cannot wholly recompense the deeds of the truly faithful and even the heaviest of punishments are not enough chastisement for some crimes. Can a person whose crime is the murder of thousands of innocent people be completely punished in this world? On the one hand, many virtuous and righteous people live in hardship and privation and some sacrifice their lives for what they believe. While on the other, so many malefactors and oppressors live their whole lives in luxury, persecuting others.

Hence, because complete recompense for all humans is not possible in this world, divine justice requires that God's court of justice be established in another place or world in which people may again be faced with all their righteous and evil deeds. This world is called the Ākhirat.

In various verses, the Holy Quran indicates the fact that equality of the retribution of the righteous and the wicked is unfair and something that the intellect cannot accept. The Quran has asked many times that:

﴿افنجعل المسلمين كالمجرمين. ما لكم كيف تحكمون﴾

> *"So shall We make those who are submissive [to Allah] as the sinners? What is wrong with you; how [ill] you judge!"*[1]

﴿ام نجعل الذين آمنوا و عملوا الصالحات كالمفسدين في الارض ام نجعل المتقين كالفجار﴾

> *"Or must We make those who believe and do good as the corrupt of the world or must We make the pious as the transgressors?"*[2]

Moreover, in another place, after stressing that the equality of the requital of sinners and the righteous is unjust, the Quran states that one of the purposes of the creation of the heavens and earth is that every person receives rewards or punishments according to their deeds, such that no one is wronged:

> *"Or do those who commit evil deeds think that We shall make them as those who believe and do righteous deeds; [such that they be] equal in life and death? How ill they judge! While Allah has created the heavens and earth in justice and that each soul is recompensed for what it has earned and they shall not be wronged."*[3]

Hence, since the just retribution of all humans cannot be realized in this world, divine justice shall accomplish this end in another world.

### Depiction of the Ākhirat in the Quran

The qualities of the Ākhirat are all beyond sensory experience and the intellect can only begin to apprehend some of its general qualities such as "immortality" and "a just reckoning of our deeds". Thus, in order to understand the details of Resurrection we have no choice but to resort to another source of information beyond sensory experience: divine revelation.

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1- *Sūrah Qalam* 68:35-36.

2- *Sūrah Ṣād* 38:28.

3- *Sūrah Jāthīyah* 45:21-22.

این راه را نهایت صورت کجا توان بست
کش صد هزار منزل بیش است در بدایت
در این شب سیاهم گم گشت راه مقصود
از گوشه‌ای برون آی ای کوکب هدایت

*Where can be the ultimate end of this path?*
*Even at first glance there can be more than a hundred thousand halting places!*
*In this Stygian night, I have lost the path towards my destination;*
*Come out of your hiding place, O star of guidance!*

One of the reasons that the Resurrection has been so extensively described in the Quran may be that our intellect and experience are useless in this issue.

In any case, there are hundreds of Quranic verses on this topic. We shall present a succinct discussion on the content of some of these verses in order to depict the general appearance of otherworldly life as shown in the Quran. Some of the elements will be discussed in greater detail.

### 1. The Events Prior to the Resurrection

The Quran attests that before the Resurrection suddenly and unforeseeably phenomenal events shall occur in the world around us that are portents of Qīyāmat. At that time, a great revolution will occur in the cosmos such that it will seem like it is the end of the world. Mountains shall tremble,[1] crumble,[2] become as scattered dust,[3] and ultimately nothing but a mirage will remain of them.[4] The seas will swarm over[5] and ignite.[6] A titanic earthquake will transpire.[7] The pillars of the earth will break up and what is hidden in the bowels of the earth will be revealed.[1] The sun will be darkened, the stars shall be extinguished,[2] and celestial bodies will be scattered.[3] The firmament will be rent asunder,[4] become as molten metal,[5] and shall be rolled up as a scroll is rolled up.[6]

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[1] 1- *Sūrah Muzzammil* 73:14.
[2] 2- *Sūrah Wāqi'ah* 56:5.
[3] 3- *Wāqi'ah* 56:6.
[4] 4- *Sūrah Naba'* 78:20.
[5] 5- *Sūrah Infiṭār* 82:3.
[6] 6- *Sūrah Takwīr* 81:6.
[7] 7- *Sūrah Ḥajj* 22:1-2; *Sūrah Muzzammil* 73:14; and *Sūrah Wāqi'ah* 56:4.

### 2. Winding the Horn

The word *ṣūr* (horn) has been used ten times in the Holy Quran and all these cases indicate the end of the world or the initiation of Qīyāmat. The horn will be blown twice. The results of the first blast [*nafkh*] are different from the second. The following verse explicitly indicates both resonations:

> *"And the Horn shall be winded and all in the heavens and on earth will fall unconscious save those who Allah wills; then it shall be winded again and suddenly all shall stand beholding."*[7]

We have extracted the following points from Quranic verses and Hadith regarding this issue:

- **a.** Universal unconsciousness [*ṣa'iqa*] (euphemistic of death) and disbandment of the current state of the world is a consequence of the first blast, and the collective rise of humans and the uniting of the ancients and future generations for reckoning pertain to the second blast.
- **b.** The first blast results in the death of contingent beings while the second gives them life. Various savants analogize this to blowing on a fire that may douse it or enflame it.

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1- *Sūrah Zilzal* 99:1-2.
2- *Sūrah Takwīr* 81:1-2; *Sūrah Mursalāt* 77:8.
3- *Sūrah Infiṭār* 82:2.
4- *Sūrah Inshiqāq* 84:1; *Sūrah Infiṭār* 82:1.
5- *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:8.
6- *Sūrah Anbiyā'* 21:104.
7- *Sūrah Zūmar* 39:68.

**c.** There is an interval between the two blasts. The first blast is performed by an angel named *Israfel*, and the second is performed by God.[1]

### 3. Advent of Ākhirat Life[2]

After the second blast, which is the breath of life, our otherworldly souls and bodies are united, humans exit their graves,[3] and confused, afraid,[4] and bewildered scatter about like moths.[5] They seek a method of escape but there is none.[6] They flee from their families[7] and while their eyes are dropped in shame,[8] they speed towards the divine presence.[9] Here, all people, from first to last, are gathered in an immense arena.[10] The lineaments of unbelievers contrast to those of believers and their visages attest to their faith or unbelief.[11] Thus, the Ākhirat begins.

### 4. The Reckoning of Deeds

The Quran has various designations for the Last Day, each of which signifies a specific quality. Some of these names include the Day of Rising [*yawm ul-qiyāmah*], the Day of Gathering [*yawm ul-jam'*], the Day of Resurrection [*yawm ul-ba'th*], the Day of Egress (from graves) [*yawm ul-khurūj*], the Day of Regret [*yawm ul-hasrah*], the Day of Separation (of good from evil) [*yawm ul-faṣl*], the Imminent Day [*yawm ul-azifah*], the Final Day [*yawm ul-ākhir*], the Day of Immortality [*yawm ul-khulūd*], etc. Another name for this day is Judgment Day [*yawm ul-ḥisāb*] and together with issues such as *book*

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1- For more comprehensive information, see: Amīr Dīvānī, *Ḥayāt-e Jāvdānah (Eternal Life)*.

2- Again, this section does not include the complete translation of Quranic verses. Therefore, in order to complete the study it is necessary to refer to the respective verses in the Quran.

3- *Sūrah Zūmar* 39:68; *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:51; *Sūrah Kahf* 18:99; and *Sūrah Qāf* 50:42.

4- *Sūrah Qāf* 50:20.

5- *Sūrah Qāri'ah* 101:4.

6- *Sūrah Qiyāmah* 75:10-11.

7- *Sūrah 'Abas* 80:34-37.

8- *Sūrah Ma'ārij* 70:44.

9- *Sūrah Yāsīn* 36:51.

10- *Sūrah Kahf* 18:99; *Sūrah Taghābun* 64:9.

11- *Sūrah 'Abas* 80:38-41; and *Sūrah Qiyāmah* 75:22-25.

*of deeds*, *witnesses*, *scales*, etc. these words all pertain to the establishment of the divine court of justice in the next world.

All people's deeds in this world are their respective capital in the next. This capital belongs to no one save its respective agent. It persists with the endurance of its agent and will persist for all time. The reality of this wealth will manifest in another world. The world in which these deeds are reckoned must be a complete world in order that the truth of the deeds are correctly manifested and so that the judged may correctly and completely perceive the reality of their actions.

﴿وَ أَنْ لَّيسَ لِلإنسانِ إلّا ما سَعىٰ. و أَنَّ سَعيَهُ سَوفَ يُرىٰ﴾

> *"And humans have nothing save what they have labored. And [the fruits of] their labors shall soon be seen."*[1]

**Further Reading**

1. Every person's actions, consistent with his or her existential make-up, are divided into external (manifest) and internal (hidden) acts. Manifest acts are those that are performed by various parts of the body such as hands, eyes, ears, etc. In contrast, hidden acts are those that stem from the mind regardless of whether they attain corporal manifestation or not. External and internal acts are both considered deeds and will be considered in the Reckoning.

﴿وَ إِن تُبدُوا ما في أَنفُسِكُم أَو تُخفُوهُ يُحاسِبكُم بِهِ الله﴾

> *"And whether you show what is in your hearts or hide it, Allah will account you for it."*[2]

2. The actions of all individuals are part of them. Not only that, but they make up a person's essence and determine their identity. Action is not accidental to the human substance and is not uninfluential with our essence; rather, it pierces into the human nature and becomes an integral part of the individual. All humans are free to fashion their true selves with their actions. Thus, due to the difference among their deeds, humans are typically diversified. Various issues can be inferred from this fact, including:

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1- *Sūrah Najm* 53:39-40.
2- *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:284.

2.1. Before an action, the individual is free to fulfill it or not. In other words, unperformed actions are in the domain of a person's volition and authority. However, after an action is realized the person becomes dominated by the action, because it achieves union with the existential reality of the individual.

﴿كُلُّ نَفسٍ بِما كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ﴾

*"Every soul is prisoner of what they have earned."*[1]

2.2. The union of persons and their deeds signifies that persons cannot relieve themselves of their actions, they cannot produce associates, they cannot place their blame on others, and they cannot dissimulate and make themselves seem innocent. Here, another difference between this world and Ākhirat is revealed.

﴿وَ لاتَزِرُ وازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخرىٰ وَ إِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلىٰ حِملِها لايُحمَلْ مِنهُ شَيءٌ وَ لَــو
كانَ ذا قُربىٰ﴾

*"No laden person [with sin] bears the load of another and if a heavily laden person calls for someone's help, no fraction of it will be carried [by the other] even if the person is close family."*[2]

2.3. The unity of the ego and its deeds shows that an action, even if it is forgotten, will have a constant presence in the individual's being until the conditions for its remembrance accrue.

3. God, whose knowledge is absolute and who is immanent throughout all things, shall not carry out the reckoning of human deeds for the purpose of discovering unknowns. The reckoning is for people to become aware of the complete reality of their own manifest and hidden actions. Hence, reckoning of the reality of actions necessitates infinite knowledge. No person is able to assess one's own deeds or the deeds of others.

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1- *Sūrah Muddathir* 74:38.
2- *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:18.

﴿قُل إنَّ الموتَ الذّي تَفِرُّونَ مِنهُ فإنّهُ مُلاقيكم ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إلىٰ عالِمِ الغَيبِ و
الشَّهادةِ فيُنَبِّئُكُم بِما كُنتُم تعمَلُون﴾

*"Say: Verily, death, from which you flee, shall encounter you, then you shall be returned to the Knower of the Invisible and Visible and He will inform you of what you have been doing."*[1]

**5. Witnesses of Deeds**

There are witnesses in the divine court of justice that attest to the deeds of people. These testimonies must be true, accurate, and complete; therefore, not everyone is allowed to testify. A witness in Qīyāmat must have special characteristics in order that their testimonies are free of all error, ignorance, and bias which may alter the semblance of the truth. Some of these features include the following:

a. Testifiers must have witnessed the actions where and when they occurred. If witness A testifies to the actions of person B based on the word of person C, even if person C is truthful, the testimony in incomplete since the witness testified to the saying of C, not the actions of B.

b. Because actions have both an exterior and interior, a complete witness is someone who can perceive the heart of actions. No complete and conclusive judgment can be made on grounds of the superficial aspect of an action. The distinguishing facet of many actions is not just based on their outer shell but the intentions behind them.

c. Witnesses must be exempt from error in committing deeds to memory and then testifying to them. In its conventional sense, justice does not obstruct all types of errors although it may prevent deliberate errors. However, divine justice must be free of all errors.

Hence, the immaculate saints of God—the Prophets and Imams ('a)—will give complete testimonies and even the testimonies of other creations, such as each person's body parts (arms, legs, etc.), must

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1- *Sūrah Jum'ah* 62:8.

ultimately refer to the testimonies of the Immaculates. It is evident that such testimonies cannot be achieved in conventional human judgments in this world. Thus, religion as practiced in this worldly life puts appearances and principles into effect in order to settle disputes but leaves complete adjudication to the Judgment Day, which is the perfect manifestation of justice.

### 6. Retribution

One of the names of the final day is the Day of Requital or Religion [*yawm ud-dīn*]. One meaning for *dīn* is requital and to requite means to make appropriate return. Therefore, rewarding and punishment may also be called requital [*jazā'*] because they are returns for actions committed. Another meaning for *dīn* is religion. The final day is called the Day of Religion because it is when all elements of religion are revealed.

Otherworldly rewards and punishments are essentially different from the recompense prevalent in this world. Worldly retribution is *convention based* hence two disparate judicial systems may determine contrasting punishments for a uniform crime. Punishing criminals is usually done with intents such as "prevention of similar cases", "disciplining wrongdoers", and "easing the minds of those whose rights were abused". However, in the Ākhirat, recompense for one's actions is *genuine*. It is a place where none of the worldly intentions and purposes for retribution are applicable. What is given in reward to the faithful and righteous or in punishment to the unbelievers and sinners is purely the *reality* of their manifest and hidden actions, which results in bounties or tribulations.

> *Even though walls throw long shadows;*
> *Their shadows return to themselves anew.*
> *This world is as a mountain, our deeds as shouts;*
> *The echoes of our shouts return to us in kind.*[1]

Many verses explicitly speak of the *identicalness* of actions and their recompense:

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[1] Jalal ad-Din Mawlavī, *Mathnavī-e Ma'navī (Spiritual Couplets)*, Book I, verses 214-215.

﴿و ما تقدّموا لأنفسكم من خيرٍ تجدوه عند الله﴾

> *"And whatever good you send forth for yourself, you shall find with Allah."*[1]

﴿هل تجزون الّا ما كنتم تعملون﴾

> *"Are you recompensed save for what you did?"*[2]

﴿إنّ الّذين يأكلون اموال اليتامى ظلماً انّما يأكلون في بطونهم ناراً و سيصلون سعيراً﴾

> *"Verily, those who unjustly consume the properties of orphans are in fact devouring fire in their bellies and shall soon burn in flames."*[3]

In conclusion, in Qīyāmat, everyone will face their own reality. Requital is the reality of each person's deeds; the manifestation of each person's true visage. An example of this can be seen in our inner attributes. The essence of ethical evils, such as envy, is literally pain and torment and the essence of virtues is ease and tranquility. Hence, some scholars hold that if someone truly perceives their inner self in this world, they can realize whether they will be delivered or damned in Ākhirat.

Moreover, the wicked will only realize equivalent retribution for their deeds, while the faithful and righteous will enjoy many more blessings than their deeds warrant.

﴿مَن جآءَ بالحسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشرُ أمثالِها و مَن جآءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فلايُجزىٰ إلّا مِثلَها و هُم لايُظلَمُون﴾

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[1] *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:110.

[2] *Sūrah Naml* 27:90. Additionally, see: *Sūrah Muzzammil* 73:20; *Sūrah Qiṣaṣ* 28:84; *Sūrah Zilzal* 99:6-8; *Sūrah Āli'Imrān* 3:30, 3:180; *Sūrah Naba'* 78:40; *Sūrah Ḥashr* 59:18; *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:272, 2:281; *Sūrah Kahf* 18:49; *Sūrah Taḥrīm* 66:7; *Sūrah Takwīr* 81:14; *Sūrah Aḥqāf* 46:19; *Sūrah Zumar* 39:24, 39:48, 39:51, 39:70; *Sūrah Tawbah* 9:35; *Sūrah Naḥl* 16:111; *Sūrah Ṭūr* 52:16; *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:147, 7:180; and *Sūrah Saba'* 34:33.

[3] *Sūrah Nisā'* 4:10.

> *"Whoever comes with a good deed will have tenfold equivalent [rewards] and whoever comes with an evil deed will only be recompensed equally and they will not be wronged."*[1]

﴿لَهُم ما يَشَآءُونَ فيها و لَدَينا مَزِيدٌ﴾

> *"Within it, they shall have all they want and with Us is yet more."*[2]

**7. Hell [*jahannam*]**

Jahannam is the name of the otherworldly fire which is the place of punishment. Examination of various aspects of this creation is made possible by the many Quranic verses on this issue. This infernal fire is characterized using various other names. Crusher [*ḥuṭamah*] is one of these names. Hellfire, as opposed to worldly fire that may only consume the body, penetrates into the interior of persons and burns their soul:

﴿كَلّا، لَيُنبَذَنَّ في الحُطَمَةِ. و مآ أَدراكَ ما الحُطَمَةُ. نارُ اللهِ المُوقَدَةُ. الَّتي تَطَّلِعُ على الأَفئِدَةِ﴾

> *"It is not so, they shall be thrust into the Crusher. And what will make you realize what the Crusher is? It is the kindled fire of Allah, which reaches to the hearts."*[3]

Jahannam is a living creature that shows emotions such as rage. In Qīyāmat, it seeks out unbelievers and envelops them.

﴿إذآ أُلقوا فيها سَمِعُوا لَها شَهِيقاً و هِيَ تَفُور. تَكادُ تَمَيَّزُ مِنَ الغَيظِ﴾

> *"When they are cast into it, they hear it roaring while it boils and it close to bursting asunder from rage."*[4]

The retribution of Jahannam is degrading [*mahīn*], massive [*'azīm*], painful [*alīm*], constant [*muqīm*], eternal [*khuld*], intense [*shadīd*],

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1- *Sūrah An'ām* 6:160.
2- *Sūrah Qāf* 50:35.
3- *Sūrah Humazah* 104:4-7.
4- *Sūrah Mulk* 67:7-8.

engulfing [*muḥīṭ*], greater [*akbar*], unknown [*nukr*], and invariable and necessary [*'izām*].

People who dwell there reveal their true natures such as excuse-bringing, lying, selfishness, and malice. They viciously assail and curse each other and each of them wants the torment of the rest to be more severe that their own.

In this terrible fire, death lashes forth from all sides but does not permit rest and freedom from agony. The inhabitants of Hell beg for death but there is no death in the Ākhirat, the realm of everlasting life.

﴿يأتيهِ المَوتُ مِن كلّ مكانٍ و ما هُوَ بمَيّتٍ﴾

*"Death comes at him from every side but he does not die."*[1]

Hell, like Heaven, is a divine blessing. Many people shun the path of wretchedness in this world for fear of eternal damnation. Simultaneous with it being the manifestation of God's wrath, it is an aspect of His universal mercy. In a way, fear of Hell can be likened to fear of Allah's wrath. Thus, this type of fear is not been forbidden by religion because one pinnacle of religious training is fear of God not His creations.

﴿هٰذهِ جَهَنَّمُ الّتي يُكَذّبُ بِها المُجرمونَ. يَطُوفُونَ بَينَها و بَينَ حَميمٍ آنٍ. فَبأَيِّ آلآءِ
رَبِّكُما تُكَذّبانِ﴾

*"This is the same Hell that sinners denied. Now they drift between it and burning waters. So, which of your Lord's bounties do you deny?"*[2]

## 8. Paradise

The Noble Quran terms the eternal dwelling place of the faithful and righteous *Jannat*. The word *jannat* literally means a garden covered with trees. The Garden of Paradise has unending facets and no form of corruption whatsoever prevails over it or its inhabitants.

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1- *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* 14:17.
2- *Sūrah Raḥmān* 55:43-45.

﴿مَثَلُ الجَنَّةِ الَّتي وُعِدَ المُتَّقونَ تَجري مِن تَحتِها الأَنهارُ أُكُلُها دآئِمٌ و ظِلُّها، تِلكَ عُقبَى الَّذينَ اتَّقَوا و عُقبَى الكافِرينَ النّارُ﴾

> *"This is a description of the Paradise that has been promised to the pious: Beneath its [trees] runs rivers, its produce is perpetual, and its shade is also; this is the requital of the pious and the requital of the unbelievers is the Fire."*[1]

As for those who attain the rank of servitude—those who worship God because He is worthy of worship—neither to attain Heaven nor due to fear of Hell—they shall enter a paradise that cannot be described or even imagined.

﴿يآ أَيَّتُها النَّفسُ المُطمَئِنَّةُ. اِرجِعِيٓ إِلىٰ رَبِّكِ راضِيَةً مَّرضِيَّةً. فَٱدخُلي في عِبادي. وَٱدخُلي جَنَّتي﴾

> *"O tranquil soul! Return to your Lord while you are well pleased with Him and He is well pleased with you. So join My servants. And enter My Paradise."*[2]

Heaven is entirely clean and pure and no defilement or foulness may enter it. Before entering Heaven, all persons are purified of all uncleanliness by divine absolution or temporary punishment.

﴿و نَزَعنا ما في صُدُورِهِم مِن غِلٍّ﴾

> *"And We shall strip all rancor from within their breasts."*[3]

The virtuous shall have all they want in Paradise. In contrast to this world, Heaven does not have a constant appearance and its alteration is not subject to time, ability, deterioration, and corruption. The preference of the heavenly inhabitant determines Heaven's form. However, heavenly inhabitants, who are unencumbered of all vileness, desire only ethical things. Their volition is suffused with ethics and divinity. In heaven, which is the abode of safety and health, there is no trace of fear, sorrow, suffering, fatigue, pain, or spiritual and corporal debilities. Heaven is the place of fulfillment of the divine human's ideals.

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[1] *Sūrah Ra'd* 13:35.
[2] *Sūrah Fajr* 89:27-30.
[3] *Sūrah A'rāf* 7:43.

> *"And they say, 'Praise be to Allah who has taken from us all sorrow. Verily, Allah is All-forgiving, All-bountiful, who through His grace has settled us in the everlasting abode, wherein neither hardship touches us nor weariness.'"*[1]

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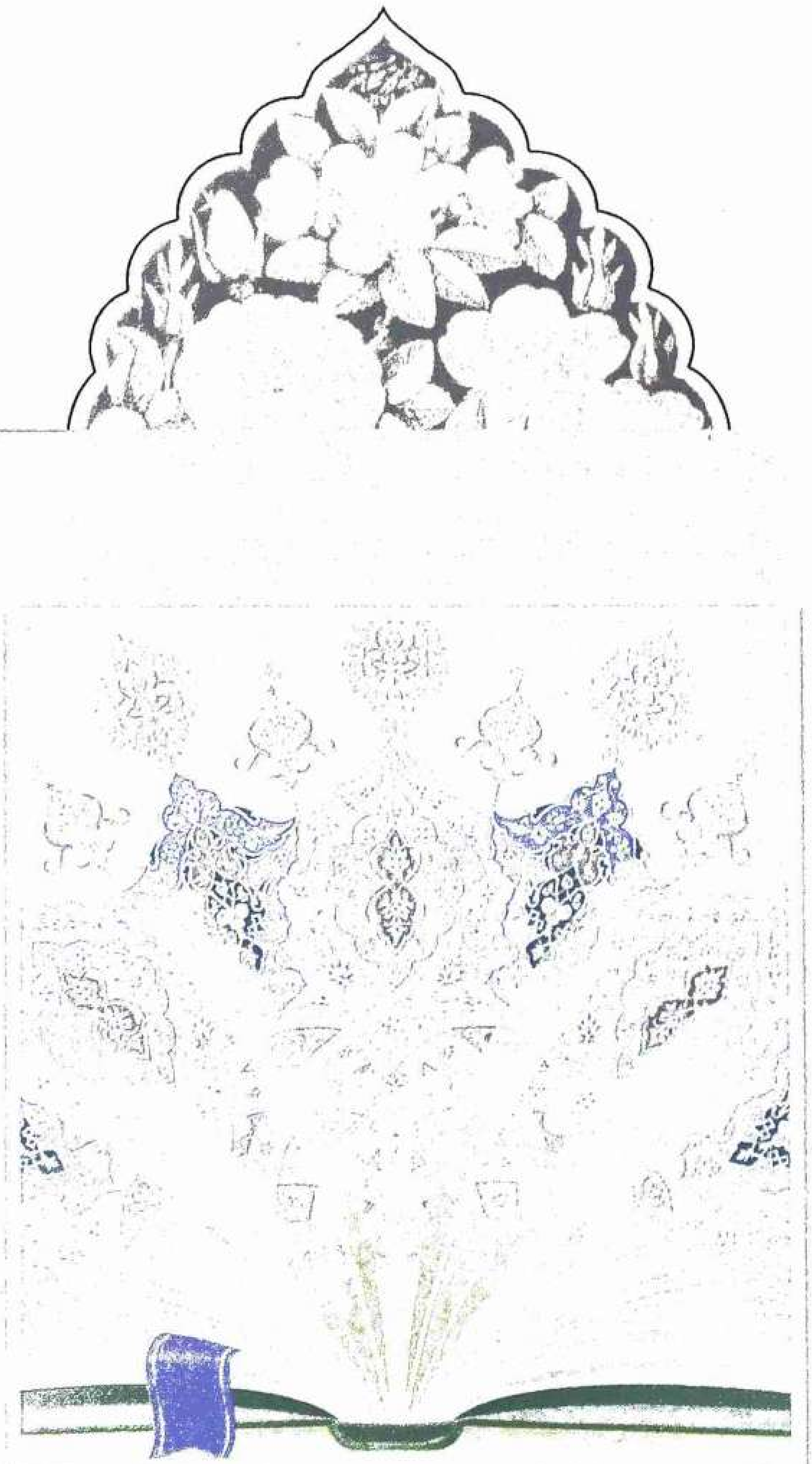
[1] *Sūrah Fāṭir* 35:34-35.



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